

PRABUDDHA BHARATA *or* **AWAKENED INDIA**

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



June 2014

Vol. 119, No. 6

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THE ROAD TO WISDOM

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON

Time

TIME is merely the measure of our thoughts, and thought being inconceivably swift, there is no limit to the speed with which we can live the life ahead. So it cannot be stated how long it would take to live all future life. It might be in a second, or it might take fifty lifetimes. It depends on the intensity of the desire. The teaching must therefore be modified according to the needs of the taught. The consuming fire is ready for all, even water and chunks of ice quickly consume. Fire a mass of bird-shot, one at least will strike; give a man a whole museum of truths, he will at once take what is suited to him. Past lives have moulded our tendencies; give to the taught in accordance with his tendency. Intellectual, mystical, devotional, practical—make one the basis, but teach the others with it. Intellect must be balanced with love, the mystical nature with reason, while practice must form part of every method. Take every one where he stands and push him forward. Religious teaching must always be constructive, not destructive.

Each tendency shows the life-work of the past, the line or radius along which that man must move. All radii lead to the centre. Never even attempt to disturb anyone's tendencies; to do that puts back both teacher and taught. When you teach Jnana, you must



become a Jnani and stand mentally exactly where the taught stands. Similarly in every other Yoga. Develop every faculty as if it were the only one possessed, this is the true secret of so-called harmonious development. That is, get extensity with intensity, but not at its expense. We are infinite. There is no limitation in us, we can be as intense as the most devoted Mohammedan and as broad as the most roaring atheist.

The way to do this is not to put the mind on any one subject, but to develop and control the mind itself; then you can turn it on any side you choose. Thus you keep the intensity and extensity. Give up the waves and go to the ocean, then you can have the waves as you please. Control the “lake” of your own mind, else you cannot understand the lake of another's mind.

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2013), 7.101–2.

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According to Swami Vivekananda, 'With the birth of Sri Ramakrishna the Golden Age has begun.' But today, for the generality of people, such an assertion may appear preposterous, with no sign of such a beginning visible anywhere. Who was Sri Ramakrishna? What was the purpose of his advent? Did he bring about a silent revolution, unseen on the surface?

This book skilfully deals with these issues, taking for its subject the Avatarahood of Sri Ramakrishna and its universal significance. In the course of his discussion the author presents the different facets of an Avatara and the universal relevance of his message. Many other spiritual topics too are dealt with, all of which go into the making of this impressive and inspiring work.



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Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

Reality's Attributes

June 2014
Vol. 119, No. 6

ज्ञातृज्ञानज्ञेयानामाविर्भावतिरोभावज्ञाता स्वयमेवमाविर्भावतिरोभावहीनः स्वयंज्योतिः स साक्षीत्युच्यते । ब्रह्मादिपिपीलिकापर्यन्तं सर्वप्राणिबुद्धिष्वविशिष्टतयोप-लभ्यमानः सर्वप्राणिबुद्धिस्थो यदा तदा कूटस्थ इत्युच्यते । कूटस्थाद्युपहितभेदानां स्वरूपलाभहेतुर्भूत्वा मणिगणसूत्रमिव सर्वक्षेत्रेष्वनुस्यूतत्वेन यदा प्रकाशत आत्मा तदाऽन्तर्यामीत्युच्यते । सर्वोपाधिविनिर्मुक्तः सुवर्णवद्विज्ञानघनश्चिन्मात्रस्वरूप आत्मा स्वतन्त्रो यदाऽवभासते तदा त्वंपदार्थः प्रत्यगात्मेत्युच्यते । सत्यं ज्ञानमनन्तमानन्दं ब्रह्म सत्यमविनाशि नामदेशकालवस्तुनिमित्तेषु विनश्यत्सु यन्न विनश्यत्यविनाशि तत्सत्यमित्युच्यते । ज्ञानमित्युत्पत्तिविनाशरहितं चैतन्यं ज्ञानमित्यभिधीयते ॥

He who knows the manifestation and disappearance of the knower, knowledge, and the knowable, but is devoid of such manifestation and disappearance, is called the self-luminous Witness. When perceived in an undifferentiated manner as residing in the intelligence of all beings, from Brahma to an ant, it is called the Kutastha. When being the means of realizing the real nature of the Kutastha and others—which are differentiations by virtue of possessing limiting adjuncts—the Atman manifests itself as interwoven in all bodies, like the thread through a string of pearls, is then called the Inner Ruler. When the Atman shines forth—devoid of all limiting adjuncts, brilliant, as homogeneous Consciousness in its nature of pure intelligence and absolute freedom—then it is spoken of as the entity 'Thou' and as the Inner Self. (That which is) Satya, Jnana, the Infinite, and Bliss is Brahman. The Reality is the Indestructible—That which, when name, space, time, substance, and causation are destroyed dies not is the Indestructible and is called Satya. And that essence of intelligence that has no beginning and no end is spoken of as Jnana.

(Sarva Upanishad, 3)

THIS MONTH

One can approach Sri Ramakrishna's comprehensive *bhava*, the spiritual symbol of this age, while **Understanding One's Existence**.



Sri Ramakrishna had many *bhavas* but the predominant one was infinity. In **Sri Ramakrishna's Bhava: Reflection of the Infinite**, Swami Samarpanananda, of the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur Math, presents how *bhava* can be understood and cultivated.

Every avatara accomplishes a specific mission according to the world's spiritual needs. Swami Aparananda, Minister-in-charge, Vedanta Society of Berkeley, writes on **Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda's Mission**.

A high degree of motivation and strength is required in spiritual life to overcome obstacles. To achieve that degree of strength there is an effective science that was developed many centuries ago. Brahmachari Purna-chaitanya of the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narainpur, details **The Power of Yoga to Counter Obstacles**.



Rhyddhi Chakraborty, a doctoral student at the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, deals with the implications of **Business and Ethical Leadership** in the present age.



The many races and peoples that migrated into India were fused and absorbed into India's cultural body. In **Mashan: Deity of the Rajbanshis**

Subrato Sanyal describes a particular kind of belief and worship of some of the people that migrated into India from the north-east. The author is a chartered engineer and technical and energy auditor at Jalpaiguri, West Bengal.

Father Anthony Susai Raj, a Catholic priest who is doing research on Swami Vivekananda at Sophia University, Tokyo, presents a vivid and passionate narration of different topics that highlight **Jesus in the Eyes of Vivekananda**.



In the nineteenth part of **Eternal Words** Swami Adbhutananda gives important advice to spiritual seekers from all walks of life and specifically instructs us to remember God while carrying out all our duties. The swami's words are translated from *Sat Katha*, published from Udbodhan Office, Kolkata.



Understanding One's Existence

HUMANKIND, from its very beginnings, has been a species with a marked tendency towards curiosity. This curiosity was initially employed in ensuring its survival. As humankind progressed, curiosity was instrumental in developing systems of knowledge concerned with physical, mental, and psychical phenomena. Through observation and systematic experimentation humans are now trying to discover the one material, force, or energy from where everything has sprung. We will ultimately find the different physical, mental, and psychical dimensions—of the world and the human personality—converging here. Swami Vivekananda says: 'Unity in variety is the plan of creation.' At the heart of this universe there is a seed or source that has given rise to this diversity of creation.

Similarly, if we want to trace the history of a race, society, or culture we can do so with certain keywords. Those keywords have become pivotal in the cultural history of a particular race. Those words take on, over the centuries, different layers of meanings according to the different contexts. If we can find one of those words and study its evolution and development, we can understand the whole history of that race. In India one of those words is *bhava*. Throughout its long history *bhava* has been increasingly employed, scrutinized, analysed, implied, and availed by almost all the people, from saints and philosophers to common persons doing the most menial tasks. This has resulted in a host of meanings being associated with it.

Bhava, with its multiple meanings, has expanded into secondary meanings and further into tertiary meanings, and so on, stretching the word into a vast network of meanings. *Bhava* comes from the root *bhu*, becoming, being, or existing. As this word encapsulates existence, everything—internal and external—is connected to the meaning. It is a most versatile and malleable word and is the fulcrum of religion, philosophy, rituals, sentiments, music, and dramatics—in short everything in Indian culture. To give an example of the extent of *bhava*'s reach we can cite a few meanings: character, behaviour, continuation, transition, turning, state, thinking, love, conduct, feeling, opinion, disposition, passion, substance, living creature, idea, mood, and so on. As existence is multilayered, *bhava* also is multilayered. And just as one can speak of the world as a manifestation of *bhava*, so also one can say that the body and the mind are receptacles or expressions of *bhava*. In the *Chhandogya Upanishad* the young rishi Shvetaketu is taught by his father: 'O good-looking one, as by knowing a lump of clay all things made of clay become known; all transformation has speech as its basis, and it is name only. Clay as such is the reality.' If we can know *bhava*, we can know the universe.

What then is the *bhava* of *bhava*? What is the origin of origin or the existence of existence? Today this search has become persistent and urgent for all humanity. This abstract question can be conveyed through a very significant incident that took place at Kashipur during Sri Ramakrishna's last days. 'Narendra [Swami

Vivekananda] and the devotees looked silently at the Master. Rakhal [Swami Brahmananda] said: “Narendra is now beginning to understand you rather well.” Sri Ramakrishna laughed and said: “Yes, that is so. I see that many others, too, are beginning to understand.” A few moments later the Master said: “I see that all things—everything that exists—have [*sic*] come from this.” He asked Narendra by a sign: “What did you understand?” Narendra: “All created objects have come from you.” The Master’s face beamed with joy. He said to Rakhal, “Did you hear what he said?”

Swami Saradananda, the author of the magnum opus *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, explained why he wrote first the section on Sri Ramakrishna’s real nature: ‘Unless people understand how the Master remained in *bhava-mukha* (an exalted state between the Absolute and the Relative) and how the mood of a guru was natural to him, they will not be able to comprehend the Master’s wonderful character, unprecedented mental state, and extraordinary activities. That is why we tried to make the reader understand this subject at the outset.’ We have seen the meaning of *bhava*, and *mukha* means ‘mouth’ or ‘source’. The state of *bhava-mukha* is then the source of all existence. *Bhava-mukha* is a high state of yoga open to avatars and a few highly spiritually evolved rishis. The avatars or the rishis keep their mind on this threshold between the absolute and the relative existence. From this state, in which they are identified, the avatars or the rishis can contemplate the absolute existence called Brahman and also the relative world, seeing and participating in it as the manifestation of God. This is why Sri Ramakrishna beamed when Swamiji said: ‘All created objects have come from you.’

Sri Ramakrishna was thrice commanded by the Divine Mother to remain in this state. Being established and identified with it, he became the embodiment of moods, ideas—*bhavas*—whether

spiritual or secular, and at every level of existence. Humanity, in its uniqueness, has been endowed with the desire to know its source. We have to know our source, because we want to return to it. Swamiji says: ‘If this is the law of nature, it also applies to thought. Thought will dissolve and go back to its origin. Whether we will it or not, we shall have to return to our origin which is called God or Absolute. We all came from God, and we are all bound to go back to God.’

Sri Ramakrishna in a spiritual experience ‘saw Satchidananda come out of this sheath [his body]. It said, “I incarnate Myself in every age.”’ Humanity has been travelling towards God for ages. In this age, the symbol of *bhava-mukha* for many is Sri Ramakrishna. In him is the infinite and the finite, the absolute and the relative, and everything connected with existence. Real religion is going back to our source, and we can approach this source through our own particular *bhava*, attitude. That is why Sri Ramakrishna never disturbed the *bhava* of anyone who came to him but encouraged all to be sincere in their *bhava*. He once scolded Swamiji when he disrupted a brother disciple’s *bhava*: ‘Don’t you see what harm you have done to him by injecting your attitude of mind into him? He has been progressing till now with a particular mental attitude, the whole of which has now been destroyed, like a miscarriage during the sixth month of pregnancy. What’s done is done. Don’t act so thoughtlessly from now on. The boy [Swami Abhedananda], however, is lucky that greater harm has not befallen him.’

Sri Ramakrishna in this age is not just the symbol of *bhava-mukha* but is also the comprehensive symbol of every thought, word, and deed of humanity. By God’s grace *bhava-mukha* can now be conceptualized in the person of Sri Ramakrishna. We had been quarrelling and suffering needlessly for centuries, instead of understanding and tracing our existence back to our source.



Sri Ramakrishna Bhava: Reflection of the Infinite

Swami Samarpanananda

THE LIMITLESS SKY with its stars, galaxies, and space appears to be infinite and ungraspable to us. Yet this 'infinite' gets trapped as a reflection in a tiny dewdrop dangling from a blade of grass. The infinite universe, although its details are indistinguishable in that drop, sways with the swaying of the grass in the breeze. Something like that happens when an avatara incarnates. The infinite God appears to take birth and act through a body, although this might seem inconceivable. Acharya Shankara expressed this unusual phenomenon in his introductory commentary on the Bhagavadgita: '*Dehavaniva jata iva lokanugraham kurvan lakshyate*; the avatara's embodiment, birth, and doing good to the world are a mere appearance, although they seem to be real.'

Sri Ramakrishna is that Infinite appearing to us like the reflection of the sky in a dewdrop. Though it is impossible to get the whole of him, one can feel his infinity through his personality, which is his *bhava*. For a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna the goal is to mould oneself in his *bhava*, to realize the Infinite that he is.

God, the Infinite

Terms like 'realization', 'infinity', 'God', and 'avatara' are used freely by people who have religious education; however, these terms need a little elaboration to understand Sri Ramakrishna *bhava*. The general understanding about 'God-realization' is that there is a divine Being, in the likeness of a human being, whom aspiring devotees see as they see any object around them. In

the case of 'Self-realization' the understanding is that one sees a shining light—an object again—within oneself in the depths of meditation. In either case it is thought that one 'sees' some kind of exalted 'object'. But this kind of understanding can only be called initial understanding.

The fact is that when a spiritual seeker purifies his or her mind through tapasya, knowledge reveals itself spontaneously to that seeker. In Yoga philosophy it is exemplified as an object lying invisible on the bed of a lake due to the obstruction of the waves and ripples; this object becomes visible when every wave and ripple is calmed. The visible object does not emerge as such but reveals itself, since it was lying there all along. There is a catch in this example. The invisible object is, after all, an object that we come to know through the mind. But that is not what happens with the knowledge of God, who is not an object but the eternal knower, the eternal witness. When one knows God, one knows him intuitively in the depths of one's being, without objectifying him, and what the seeker comes to know in that state is strictly his or her personal knowledge. Being infinite, God can appear to aspirants in any of the infinite ways that pleases him. That is why this knowledge is known as *svasamvedya*, a knowledge that can only be experienced internally, and can never be compared with the knowledge gained through the mind or the senses.

Every scripture describes God as being infinite. This expression cannot be understood by

those who have not yet experienced the Infinite, since it is different from the common understanding of infinity in physics, mathematics, or the external world. Ordinarily, infinite implies hugeness, like the ocean or the sky; largeness, as with numbers; and incomprehensibility or absurdity, as in physics. But the infinity of God is different from all these and has no imagery from our world to convey it.

Besides, the expression 'God is infinite' is not fully correct, because it implies that knowledge of the Infinite can be acquired. Any kind of knowledge presupposes the mediacy of the mind between the subject and the object. In case of spiritual revelations there is no subject-object duality, and hence there is no action of the mind. Therefore, the expression 'God is infinite' may sound appealing, but a better way of understanding the idea would be 'God is non-finite', to thus negate any possibility of knowledge through the mind.

Anything that is within the confines of time, space, and causation is finite and hence is not God. Now, is Sri Ramakrishna, as we commonly understand him, God? Not really. A different approach would be to state that God came in the form of Sri Ramakrishna. The infinity of God was clearly reflected in the body-mind complex of Sri Ramakrishna, as the infinite sky is reflected in the dewdrop.

If the knowledge of God is so difficult to comprehend, how much more difficult it would be to understand the idea of the Infinite appearing as finite? Probably that is why most religions have done away with the concept of avatara!

The Srimad Bhagavata gives us a clue: '*Yasya-avatara jnayante sharireshvasharirinah. Taih-stairatulyatishayairviryairdehishvasangataih*'; you are beyond a physical body, and yet you perform such feats that no being can even match, what to say of excelling [them]. It is through those great

feats of yours that you are known as God, the Lord.¹ The only way to know an avatara is to observe his unusual feats as a human being. In the case of Sri Ramakrishna, his unusual feats belong to the realm of spiritual visions and experiences. Never in the history of humankind has there been a record of spiritual experiences of such magnitude. A common person may not be able to appreciate this, but anyone who has undergone serious sadhana would know that it is humanly impossible to achieve the kind of spiritual experiences Sri Ramakrishna has achieved. The feats of Sri Rama or Sri Krishna cannot be duplicated; in the same way the spiritual achievements of Sri Ramakrishna can never be duplicated.

Two Modes of Sadhana

Attitude is everything in life, more so in spiritual life. The Sanskrit term for this is *bhava*, which plays a crucial role in the spiritual journey of every aspirant. The *Mandukya Karika* says: '*Yam bhavam darshayedasya tam bhavam sa tu pashyati. Tam chavati sa bhutva'sau tad-grahah samupaiti tam*'; the Reality is perceived by the individual as it is shown by the guru. That very *bhava* protects the individual and, in time, the individual becomes one with that *bhava*.² The far-reaching implication of *bhava* is made amply clear in this verse. It is *bhava* that sustains an aspirant, and it is *bhava* too that brings fulfillment in spiritual life.

Sri Ramakrishna *bhava* means accepting Sri Ramakrishna as the ideal. To attain that ideal one can take up one of the two models of sadhana: mould or *musha*. It is said that one needs to mould one's life according to the life of one's Ishta Devata, Chosen Ideal. On the other hand, Swamiji says that we, devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, have to refine ourselves through Sri Ramakrishna. This expression by Swamiji is quite unusual in spiritual literature. *Musha* is a

Sanskrit term; it means the crucible that is used by jewellers to purify metals like gold and silver. This implies that sadhana should be a refining process instead of a moulding process.

Mould and *musha* imply two different modes of sadhana: the dualistic and the non-dualistic respectively. Let us call these two as the 'imperfection aspect' and the 'perfection aspect'. In the

imperfection aspect the individual is perceived as limited, full of impurities and imperfections. An aspirant of this path strives to get transformed into something other than what he or she is. It is like sculpting a statue out of a marble block. In this system one has to choose an ideal, use that ideal as a mould, and then try to fit into that mould. Every dualistic religion belongs to



this model, in which shortcomings of a person-ality are treated as real, and sadhana is all about getting rid of those 'real' defects and acquiring 'real' virtues.

The second is the Vedantic approach, the perfection aspect. According to this, everything is Satchidananda, Existence-Consciousness-Bliss absolute. '*Sarvam khalvidam brahma*; all this is Brahman.'³ Vedanta preaches that everyone and everything is pure and perfect, but for reasons not known things appear to be impure and imperfect. The goal of life is to remember this and to get away from the imperfections. This system is based on the idea that a thing can become only what its true nature is. If some other nature is forced upon it, sooner or later it will fall away from that state. Acharya Shankara gives the example of a piece of sandalwood, which being in contact with water for a long time acquires a foul odour. This odour can be removed by rubbing the sandalwood. The fresh fragrance that comes out after rubbing the sandalwood is not something newly acquired, it was there all along within the wood.⁴ In this example it is not important to know how and why the sandalwood got associated with the water; the important thing is to know that there is a way out of the foul odour. We do not know why or how our transmigratory state began; we do not know why Satchidananda, the ever perfect, became imperfect, but we can find the way out of the worldliness that surrounds us and hurts us more and more.

Sri Ramakrishna *bhava* implies that both modes of sadhana are correct and equally effective to take us from our finite existence to perfection.

Acquiring Sri Ramakrishna Bhava

Although many people claim themselves to be religious, the fact is that they can be classified into three categories depending on how they

apply religion to their lives. The first category is of those who consider religion as a very special dress or robe that is worn once and then put away reverentially forever; these people take religious vows, like spiritual initiation, and there the matter ends for them. The second category is of those who on special occasions use a fashionable dress to win plaudits, but they never use it in their daily lives; most religious people love extravaganzas during festivals, without caring for regular practices. The third category is of those who use a regular garment that may not look gorgeous but is the only useful thing in their wardrobe; for them religion is a daily affair.

The Sri Ramakrishna mould implies using religion as a practical means to acquire perfection. By practising certain essential traits of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual personality, one can substantiate with his *bhava*. That is the way to become one with him in essence and acquire the treasures of jnana and bhakti.

The most important feature of the Sri Ramakrishna mould is a total commitment towards religious life. Unfortunately, for most of us the relevance of religion either gets lost over time or degenerates into lip service. The reason behind this lackadaisical attitude is lack of conviction, lack of *shraddha*. Commitment to spiritual life is a *vrata*, vow. It is said that dharma is the ritual support of *vrata*, *shraddha* is the power that allows one to perform *vrata*, and *tapas* is that which is released from the body due to the efforts made during sadhana. One cannot succeed in spiritual life unless one takes it up as a *vrata*, which in turn requires *shraddha*, the *shraddha* that comes to a person only through the conviction born of studying, discussing, and contemplating on the spiritual truths of the scriptures.

The Learned Brahmin is a famous story by the great French philosopher Voltaire, in which he writes about a brahmana who is not at peace

despite having a vast intellectual knowledge, whereas a poor widow staying near his house is completely at peace. When asked about the secret of her peace, she is surprised and says that all she knows about her religion is to sip Ganga water and take tulsi leaves. The brahmana says that he envies the peace of the widow, but would never want to be like her, for she is more like a piece of stone with no struggle left in her and hence with no possibility of further growth.

Most followers of Sri Ramakrishna do not like to lead their religious life like that of the widow, and yet nearly everyone leads that kind of life. People end up being crass ritualists to achieve peace of mind, instead of going through the rigours of spiritual growth. One reason for this is the wrong understanding that Sri Ramakrishna condemned learning. He criticized mere book-learning, but encouraged the study of the scriptures. He always wanted his disciples to know the philosophical systems properly. Once, when someone commented to him about his lack of education, he said: 'But how many scriptures I have heard!'⁵

The Sri Ramakrishna mould does not demand that everyone should give up the world. Since it is difficult to stay away from worldliness while living in the world, it is commonly said that it is difficult for a householder to be spiritual. But this is not a complete truth, for Sri Ramakrishna came to this world for the sake of his devotees. Giving his own example, he would say: 'A man visits his father-in-law's house. I, too, often used to think that I should marry, go to my father-in-law's house, and have great fun. But see what has come of it!' (593). 'At first I felt worried about my wife. Then I thought she too would eat and drink and live like me' (231). 'See, I too have a wife, and a few pots and pans in my room; I too feed a few vagabonds; I too worry about the devotees' (757).

One finds Sri Ramakrishna worrying, like a common person, about Hriday when the latter lost his job, and he then asks whether his worry was because of *daya* or *maya*? He also corrects a devotee who talks about the world as being unreal: 'No, not exactly that. The Lila is real too' (238). All this means that one need not try to throw away the world forcibly. The world is as good a place to achieve anything that one wishes to achieve. But the way of life should stress on the divine aspect of the world. From the evolutionary standpoint, a fish and a bird are the same, but they cannot change their habitat if they have to survive and grow. Similarly, no one need change one's habitat for one's spiritual growth. What one needs to change is one's attitude.

But what about the many desires? Can they be permitted? Sri Ramakrishna qualifies this problem by saying:

It is not good to cherish desires and hankerings. For that reason I used to fulfil whatever desires came to my mind. Once I saw some coloured sweetmeats at Burrabazar and wanted to eat them. They brought me the sweets and I ate a great many. The result was that I fell ill.

In my boyhood days, while bathing in the Ganges, I saw a boy with a gold ornament around his waist. During my state of divine intoxication I felt a desire to have a similar ornament myself. ...

I once felt a desire to eat the famous sweetmeats of different cities. (*All laugh.*) I had a desire to hear Sambhu's musical recital of the *Chandi*. After fulfilling that desire I wanted to hear the same thing by Rajnarayan. That desire also was satisfied.

At that time many holy men used to visit the temple garden. A desire arose in my mind that there should be a separate store-room to supply them with their provisions. Mathur Babu arranged for one. The sadhus were given food-stuffs, fuel, and the like from that store-room' (534).

These, along with many such utterances, show that there is nothing wrong with one's occasional indulgences. When ordinary desires arise in one's mind, it is better to fulfil them, otherwise they will never allow one to focus one's mind on higher things. However, one must stay away from desires with negative legal and social implications. Also, one must try to rise above desires after enjoying a bit of them.

Consistent Bhava

Bhava implies that the goal and the way have to be one and the same. If the goal is to realize God everywhere, one has to start practising the presence of God everywhere; no other *bhava* is permitted to that person while he is practising in that way. Most people frequently change their attitude in their sadhana and as a consequence reach nowhere. Unless we grow to some extent in the spiritual life, it is difficult for us to be steady with our *bhava*. Even then one has to make a conscious effort to be consistent about it. During a musical performance Sri Ramakrishna told the performers that he liked their performance because it was rhythmic. Unless one's life is rhythmic, one cannot achieve anything. Sri Ramakrishna's life was totally centred in God—his laughter, tears, words, actions, walks, slumber, everything. Once he observed that Rakhal's face was darkened. He told this to Rakhal, who then remembered he had jokingly told a lie. Rakhal confessed this to Sri Ramakrishna, who instructed him never to do so again. This is an example of an integrated personality—even in jest one must not cross the boundaries of one's *bhava*. This is the real meaning of 'ripening one's attitude'.

The best mode of spiritual practice in Sri Ramakrishna *bhava* is the path that he adopted when he started his spiritual journey at Dakshineswar. In that phase he had no direction, no guidance, no technical knowledge; there was

only the intensity of prayer, born of a complete sense of self-surrender. This self-surrender is not an easy thing, as Girish Ghosh realized after surrendering everything to Sri Ramakrishna. Self-surrender demands total, not partial, surrender. If someone in crisis seeks shelter with a king, that person cannot flaunt his own power anymore; he has to fall at the king's feet and express his own helplessness. Only then can he expect help. In spiritual life too, when one practises self-surrender one has to efface one's ego and the sense of self-reliance before one can hope to obtain God's shelter. A ripened Sri Ramakrishna *bhava* always implies a complete self-surrender.

To achieve complete self-surrender one has to begin with prayer to thus focus one's spiritual well-being. Like a child who when chastised by its mother holds her more tightly, one has to learn to hold on to Sri Ramakrishna more tightly when in pain. The joy and pain that come to devotees come, indeed, from Sri Ramakrishna. To make one's *bhava* stronger, one has to realize this and go deeper into Sri Ramakrishna *bhava* during emotional upheavals.

It matters not whether one uses one's *bhava* as a mould or as *musha*. The goal is to realize that like the reflection of the universe in the tiny dewdrop, Sri Ramakrishna is the reflection of the Infinite. This reflection is capable of conveying the idea of the supreme Reality to anyone and is also capable of making a practitioner one with the Infinite.



References

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2. Gaudapada, *Mandukya Karika*, 2.29.
3. *Chhandogya Upanishad*, 3.14.1.
4. See Acharya Shankara's commentary on *Isha Upanishad*, 1.
5. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 908.

Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda's Mission

Swami Aparananda

WHEN WE COME ACROSS Swami Vivekananda we feel an inexpressible urge to know him further, understand him more deeply, and assimilate his teachings into our daily lives. We feel that by not doing this our lives appear to be incomplete. Since Swamiji's advent many scholars have written about his multifaceted personality as well as his world mission. It is said that people are benefited personally, in some way, by coming in contact directly or indirectly with a genius, whether or not they hold that gifted person dear to their hearts. Thus it is not surprising that the study of Swamiji's life and mission has brought about a profound effect on many people in the East and the West. After coming in contact with Swamiji some have felt as if they could catch a glimpse of divinity in their own souls; for others, life took a completely different turn, as their perception of life and the world changed; some sceptical minds were caught off guard with an experience of the mind's peaceful state that they never knew of before, which generated a feeling of faith in religion as well. Without a doubt, these instances prove that Swamiji led many individuals towards certain spiritual truths that would otherwise have remained hidden.

The Infinite within

The Upanishads mention sage Narada, who, though learned in many sciences, approaches sage Sanatkumara for a solution to his sorrow. After teaching him about the various levels of existence,

Sanatkumara declares: 'That which indeed is the Infinite, is joy. There is no joy in the finite. The Infinite alone is joy. But the Infinite indeed has to be sought after.'¹ This joy is beyond our senses; it is divine and can be experienced. Again, in this age, Sri Ramakrishna has declared that wealth can buy us everything, but not divine bliss! It was only befitting that his foremost disciple, Swami Vivekananda, after realizing this Truth and experiencing divine bliss, came forwards to give this knowledge to the world. The path to Truth may be arduous and complex, but Swamiji has opened the door for everyone and showed us the way through his ever-encouraging words.

Everything today is looked at through the lens of reason and logic. Multitudes of machines have made their way into our daily lives, to the extent that it has made us helplessly dependent on them. It has made our minds so mechanical that it can now only dwell in the physical world. To such a mind thoughts of God, the Atman, and the afterlife remain as mere words. Such minds fail to find any peace because, after all, peace is never to be found in the external world. Whoever finds this eternal peace in their hearts live emanating a peaceful vibration wherever they go. It is said that when Buddha roamed the streets of Prayaga, ordinary people and even animals walking those streets felt as if for a moment they too touched upon that same state of eternal peace and silence.

When Swamiji stood upon the world stage everyone, especially the people of the West,

wondered with awe how a person could be totally free of desires, wealth, and worldly happiness and yet be fully familiar with the world, so full of knowledge! When questioned on any topic, however trivial or complex the question, nobody ever heard him say 'I don't know', either out of ignorance or disinterest. Naturally, many people paid reverence and accepted him as their teacher. Friend or foe, learned or ignorant, rich or poor, Swamiji brought them all together, inspiring them to the common task of realizing one's innate divinity. Swamiji declared that inside every life runs the same divine Consciousness. Divinity, although existing everywhere, is expressed more in and through human beings. To manifest this innate divinity then becomes the goal of human life and the only path towards permanent joy, peace, and contentment. Swamiji presented this truth in many ways to many people. Being a seer of Truth he knew there was no other way to overcome fear and weakness and also to be released from the cycle of birth and death.

The Bhagavadgita declares: 'O Arjuna, Ishvara resides in the region of the heart of all creatures, who are revolving through maya (as though they were) mounted on a machine.'² The created beings do not know God's presence within their heart and are helplessly going through the cycle of birth and death, under the law of cause and effect of all their actions accumulated over thousands of births. Although what is apparently visible to us is the variety of these created beings and their many discordant actions, the truth is the unity behind this diversity, the one Consciousness running through and controlling all life. All physical and spiritual sciences ultimately lead to this unity as its culminating point, where the many slowly merge into the One. This truth is almost beyond the reach of ordinary human intelligence to know,

understand, and grasp without divine grace. Clouds of doubt envelop the human mind all the time, and it is very difficult to release the mind from their grip.

What causes the appearance of the many? Swamiji explained that although the power of God and his maya are the same, their expressions differ. The power of maya gives rise to the three qualities of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* in created beings and creates the feelings of joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, and all the pairs of opposite experiences. The power of maya, however, rests in God and is under his control, working for the sake of God only; hence this power is Divine. Through the power of maya a living being gets enveloped in the ignorance of 'I and mine', thinking one's little self to be the doer, enjoyer, and knower. The external world one sees becomes the be all and end all, in which one goes about to enjoy, discover, or conquer. This pursuit has indeed taken humans down the road of progress in the field of science and technology. So much so that many natural forces in the external world can be claimed to have been brought under human control!

Swamiji had foreseen this scientific revolution and hence did not belittle or deny physical sciences in favour of spiritual science. He highlighted the contribution of physical science in human life, but mentioned that human civilization can find its fuller meaning and expression through the simultaneous development of both spirituality and science. He warned that, in the long run, neglecting or ignoring spirituality would only lead humankind towards destruction, into more maya.

Swamiji emphasized that the study of one's inner world and mental powers requires concentration, meditation, knowledge, love of God, and unselfish work. The gross powers of the mind give us understanding of the physical

world; the subtle powers of the mind, developed through yoga, give us understanding of the spiritual world. It is this subtle power of the spiritual world that controls life and regulates all living beings. The invisible power that is regulating all living beings and is the cause of all gross, subtle, and subtlest powers works in accordance to a universal law. This universal law or universal Consciousness is also mentioned in the Gita. God himself is the ultimate master of this universal law. According to Vedanta, the knowing, doing, and willing of all created beings are but expressions of the Creator.

According to Swamiji, whenever there is a similar law observed throughout the world, that law becomes a 'science', and the person making the discovery is termed a scientist. Similarly, by following the yogas as laid down in the scriptures, a person is able to discover and bring under control the powers governing the mental world and subsequently experience the highest spiritual truths. We find from history that indeed such has been the case; many sages and seers have realized the highest spiritual truths after gaining control over their minds, and have experienced divine knowledge and bliss as well. Spirituality would thus be the science of the internal world, and the examples of the sages and seers should be regarded as authentic guidelines for future aspirants to follow.

According to Vedanta, diversity is the expression of the One. We will continue to see the many if we do not endeavour to reach the One. In the present age the knowledge of this oneness



'Nachiketa', by Mrinal Kanti Das

has become very necessary. We can reach this knowledge by practising universal love as explained by Swamiji.

Everyone has to encounter various obstacles in the path of life. Swamiji emphasized the necessity of the study of religious scriptures, as they have many hidden truths that help one face the hurdles of life. Citing the example of the boy Nachiketa, mentioned in the *Katha Upanishad*, Swamiji affirmed the importance of possessing *shraddha*, faith, and regard for the Atman or God. It was the strength of his *shraddha* that led Nachiketa to Truth by overcoming many obstacles and temptations.

A true spiritual person is able to assist numerous human beings on the spiritual path. After coming in contact with a spiritual person one develops faith in one's religious ideal, believes in the power of morality, and gains inspiration to follow a high ideal. Swamiji is such an inspiration. He has reminded us again and again of the infinite joy, peace, and bliss in store for us as a result of spiritual unfoldment. He substantiated this by his own direct experience. When spiritual progress becomes the goal of life, our perspective of the world is transformed. Everything and everyone around us looks different when a current of spirituality is flowing. The all-powerful, all-knowing, and ever-living God is then perceived within and without, pervading the universe. That ultimate realization is the one goal, although the paths towards it can differ according to individual temperaments and situations in life. Scriptures like the Vedas have shown that the same God has revealed himself through different religions as suited to people of different temperaments. By choosing the path suitable to one's individuality and following the instructions regarding that path, a person makes spiritual progress. The variety is thus in the paths only, not in the ultimate goal; thus there should be no cause for any hatred, criticism, quarrels, and arguments.

The distinctiveness of Indian religions is the emphasis on the immortality of the human soul. This belief has become an intimate part of Indian culture. Indian sages and seers have, after Self-realization, declared 'I am That!' Not only that, they then laid down the path towards Self-realization for others to follow. Swamiji has been the messenger of this age to guide the masses towards Self-knowledge as laid down by ancient sages. This knowledge of the Atman—or the Self or Brahman—is India's treasure. With the help of this treasure India has been able to endure

all the trials and tribulations of its history. This treasure remains the foremost wealth that India can contribute to the world.

The Meeting of Two Great Souls

Sri Ramakrishna is the Divine Mother's incredibly beloved child, and the Divine Mother is Sri Ramakrishna's everything. Apparently, to the ordinary eye, Sri Ramakrishna is a misfit—all his ways and actions are opposite to the ways of the world. To us the physical world is real; the accumulation of wealth, acquisition of property, development of family and social relationships, and possession of various material objects—all these activities keep us constantly engaged. We derive happiness and enjoy building our lives around these activities. Any loss of any of these things gives us great pain. The fear of losing gives us endless worries and causes stress. On the other hand, we find that in this same world Sri Ramakrishna is immersed in God, so engrossed in loving and worshipping God that he does not realize how his days go by. He does not have any idea of money and wealth, whose mere touch brings him sharp physical and mental pain. He cannot distinguish between a bag of gold and a lump of clay—to him they are no different. He has no interest whatsoever in anything that we find attractive. Instead, he weeps to the Divine Mother to take these away from him and reveal her divinity. He continuously talks, pleads, worships, and spends his days lost in contemplation and meditation on the Divine Mother. To him she is Consciousness, pure joy, eternal, and blissful. The days when Sri Ramakrishna does not see her divine form, he experiences excruciating pain and begins crying profusely like a child. Ordinary people witnessing this scene go away drawing their own conclusions—that he is either mad or very ill; some others feel a sort of sympathy for his sorry state.

After the culmination of his sadhana and God-realization, Sri Ramakrishna began sharing with others the spiritual truths and Self-knowledge gained from his direct experiences. Naturally, most of them did not have the ability to understand his high spiritual state, but everyone enjoyed his companionship, talks, humour, singing, and dancing. At least momentarily, the burdens of their lives would disappear and they felt an unspeakable joy in his presence; it was as if in the holy company of Sri Ramakrishna the awareness of the highest Truth would arise in everyone's hearts.

Just like none could understand Sri Ramakrishna, ordinary people were baffled by Swamiji's personality. It was only Sri Ramakrishna who at the very first sight understood and recognized Swamiji's immense talents and true identity. In an instant Swamiji became near and dear to him. At that time scientific knowledge had reached India. Educated society would not accept anything unless proven and certified by science. Swamiji belonged to such a class. But in his very first encounter with Sri Ramakrishna, he was amazed—he carefully observed his renunciation, purity, truthfulness, childlike simplicity, all of which were unique and tremendously attractive to him, despite his reasoning.

Swamiji, a highly knowledgeable person of keen intellect, was not initially able to fathom who Sri Ramakrishna really was. In trying to measure Sri Ramakrishna, Swamiji was, it seemed, never able to reach the limit of his knowledge, intelligence, or devotion. He would feel that in trying to measure Sri Ramakrishna he would himself get drowned in a bottomless ocean. With one touch Sri Ramakrishna could transform Swamiji's strong resilient mind and then remould it in any way he wanted. When once Sri Ramakrishna touched him, Swamiji's

mind lost its entire individuality and merged into the ocean of bliss. The physical world, as we know and see it, vanished for Swamiji, who experienced the highest state of consciousness. These experiences finally proved to him that a divine power is constantly playing in and through Sri Ramakrishna, and it is that same divine Consciousness that has full control over all living beings as well as the gross material powers working in the world.

With his knowledge of the Vedas and other scriptures and his experiences with Sri Ramakrishna, Swamiji was convinced in the end that Sri Ramakrishna was not an ordinary soul. The scriptures mention that avatars appear in the world for the sole purpose of benefitting humankind and taking it forwards in the spiritual journey. After experiencing and being convinced that Sri Ramakrishna was one of these avatars, Swamiji dived into the field of work as Sri Ramakrishna's divine instrument.

This current slumber of delusion and worldly bondage has to be transcended with the help of the guiding light of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. In the Gita we find that Arjuna was able to wake up from his deluded state after obtaining the vision of Sri Krishna's divine form. In the current age the ignorance of the entire world has started to get shattered by the help of the divine teacher Swami Vivekananda. In his four yogas—*karma*, *bhakti*, *jnana*, and *raja*—he put forth the bold message that people of different temperaments can, according to their nature, cut through the various states and levels of ignorance and attain eternal peace. These four yogas prescribed by Swamiji, founded upon Upanishadic teachings, are taking numerous people from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge, and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future.

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The Power of Yoga to Counter Obstacles

Brahmachari Purnachaitanya

SRI KRISHNA SAYS in the Bhagavadgita: 'Among thousands of persons a rare one endeavours for perfection. Even among the perfected ones, who are diligent, one perchance knows me in truth.'¹ Most of us begin our spiritual life with great enthusiasm, but after a few years or even a few months we are unable to maintain it and slowly slacken our sadhana. As things become tepid, and then cold, we dangle between a spiritual ideal and the heavy tug of worldliness. We all know what has to be done, what the guru has taught and the scriptures have declared, but we find it very difficult to pick ourselves up and restart the long journey to perfection. It is during this time of helplessness that we come face to face with our weaknesses. The many obstructions we face are principally due to our samskaras, impressions in the mind, which forcibly drag us down. Even after repeated prayers nothing much is achieved and, gradually, the intensity of our prayers also decreases. The rule in spiritual life is that, as Sri Ramakrishna teaches, unless one has exhausted one's efforts, *purushakara*, divine grace does not arrive.

The Necessity of Strength

One of the systematic methods of sadhana is yoga. Certain practices of yoga counter the *vyutthana*, disturbing, samskaras so that one can gain strength. Swami Vivekananda says:

The science of Yoga claims that it has discovered the laws which develop this personality, and by proper attention to those laws and methods, each one can grow and strengthen his personality. This is one of the great practical things, and

this is the secret of all education. This has a universal application. In the life of a householder, in the life of the poor, the rich, the man of business, the spiritual man, in every one's life, it is a great thing, the strengthening of this personality. There are laws, very fine, which are behind the physical laws, as we know. That is to say, there are no such realities as a physical world, a mental world, a spiritual world. Whatever is, is one. Let us say, it is a sort of tapering existence; the thickest part is here, it tapers and becomes finer and finer. The finest is what we call spirit; the grossest, the body.²

A sadhaka has to understand these subtle laws in order to adjust to them. Many of us, in the beginning of our sadhana, keep pushing back the obstacles that appear in the way, but if this pushing is done intelligently, we can counter those obstacles easily and progress quicker. Yoga gives great mental strength to overcome all obstacles. Swamiji also says: 'This is the great fact: strength is life, weakness is death. Strength is felicity, life eternal, immortal; weakness is constant strain and misery: weakness is death' (2.3).

The *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali has a chapter called 'Vibhuti Pada'. Many have the impression that the power of yoga means these *vibhutis*, supernatural powers. These *vibhutis* are, in fact, obstacles to the culmination of yoga. Patanjali delineates them in order that they may not mislead the sadhaka. The goal of yoga is perfection, realization, or liberation. Through yoga one is able to resist temptations, old samskaras, and other weaknesses, which seem to appear adamant obstacles. However, there is a caveat, the practice of yoga itself has obstacles that Patanjali

warns us about, by saying: ‘The obstructions to yoga are killing, falsehood, and so on, whether committed, caused, or approved; either through avarice, anger, or ignorance; whether slight, middling, or great; and they result in infinite ignorance and misery.’³

One cannot achieve anything great in life without strength, what to speak of realization, which is the highest goal of human life. Swamiji also says: ‘The best guide in life is strength. In religion, as in all other matters, discard everything that weakens you, have nothing to do with it. Mystery-mongering weakens the human brain.’⁴ The *Mundaka Upanishad* declares: ‘*Nayam-atma bala-hinena labhyo*; this Atman cannot be attained by one devoid of strength.’⁵ Acharya Shankara comments on the compound *bala-hinena* thus: ‘Bereft of the vigour generated by constant adherence to the Atman.’⁶ This is the clearest explanation regarding strength and power. Through this power the sadhaka cannot be dragged by the objects of the senses, which depletes one’s strength and knowledge.

Different Types of Powers

Different types of strengths in the world can be categorized as:

(i) *Jagat-bala*, worldly strength, which includes *bahu-bala*, physical power; *artha-bala*, money power; *buddhi-bala*, power of the intellect; holding powerful posts, and so on. But we can see that these powers are fleeting. The famous saying of Lord Acton is true: ‘Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely.’⁷ All these powers are worldly powers, and all worldly powers are corruptible and temporary.

(ii) *Dharma-bala*, the power of dharma. The Mahabharata states: ‘Dharma protects one who protects dharma.’⁸ The power acquired by following dharma is more stable than worldly power, and history is full of such examples. The

Pandavas were victorious in the Mahabharata War. Arjuna, the greatest hero, defeated the Kauravas, including such excellent warriors as Bhishma, Drona, Kripacharya, Karna, and others. The cause of his strength, it is known, was dharma.

(iii) *Samyama balam*, the power of self-control. By controlling the senses and the mind one becomes stronger; letting them go about seeking enjoyment makes them weak. It is said in one Upanishad: ‘O Death, ephemeral are these [enjoyments], and they waste away the vigour of all the organs that a person has.’⁹ This power is also spoken of as *tapo-bala*, power of tapasya. In this category is also included *upasana*, which literally means sitting near an object, usually a deity. The deity provides the aspirant sufficient strength for controlling the senses and removing obstacles. It is mentioned in the Upanishad: ‘By the power of tapasya and the grace of God the (rishi) Shveta-shvatara realized Brahman.’¹⁰

(iv) *Yoga-bala*, the strength that comes from yoga. This is yoga proper. It makes practitioners almost invincible. No power in the world is as strong as yoga, as it is based on purity, unselfishness, love, and compassion.

(v) *Atma-bala*, the strength of the Atman. ‘*Atmana vindate viryam vidyaya vindate mritam*; through the Atman is acquired strength, and through knowledge is gained immortality.’¹¹ When one thinks of oneself as finite, finite will be one’s personality and strength. When one thinks of oneself as the infinite Atman, one’s strength and power will be infinite. This is *mukti*, freedom, which makes one fearless. The Upanishads declare that nothing in the universe can harm such a free person, not even the gods, as such a person becomes the Self of everything.¹²

One may read the scriptures and somehow understand them too, but it is almost impossible to digest them or make them practical without

spiritual strength. We can become *adhikaris*, fit, for spiritual life only after practising dharma, *samyama*, tapasya, *upasana*, and yoga, which lead us to *Atma-bala*. We become hypocrites when we do not have the strength to carry forwards our convictions. And a religious hypocrite is the worst type of all.

Once a monk came to live in the Panchavati of Dakshineswar. He would talk about Vedanta extensively with people. Then one day I [Sri Ramakrishna] heard that he was having an illicit love affair with a woman. I went in that direction to answer the call of nature and found him seated in the Panchavati. I said to him, 'You talk so much about Vedanta—now, what is this?' He replied: 'What does it matter? Let me explain to you that I have done nothing wrong. When everything in this world is unreal in the past, present, and future, how can my slips of character be real? They are also unreal.' Disgusted, I said to him, 'I spit upon such Vedantic knowledge as yours!' Worldly people have that kind of knowledge about Vedanta. That knowledge is no knowledge at all.¹³

Worldly power incurs sin and leads to immorality. But when coupled with the power of dharma, it can do great good in the world. For unless the *papa*, sins, are exhausted by *punya*, merit, one does not see the futility of the world and the need to realize something higher in life. The Mahabharata declares: 'Knowledge arises for a person on the exhaustion of sins.'¹⁴

The Cause of Loss of Strength

A frog tries to flee from a snake, which is chased by a peacock; the peacock is tracked by a leopard, which is being stalked by a hunter. Everybody is running towards one's food, but behind everyone stands death unnoticed. The power of yoga gives one a wider perspective of life as well as a microscopic vision to see deep inside the workings of the mind and the world. It makes

us understand that the *tapa-traya*, three miseries—*adhidaiva*, celestial, *adhibhuta*, earthly, and *adhyatma*, physical—are common to all beings. The *Yoga Sutra* also speaks of four types of miseries to be avoided by the yogi: '*Parinama-tapa-samskara-dubkhaiguna-vritti-virodhaccha dubkham eva sarvan vivekinah*'; to the discerning person all is, as it were, painful on account of everything bringing pain, either in the consequences, or in apprehension, or in the attitude caused by impressions, also on account of the counter action of qualities.'¹⁵

Parinama-dubkha, pain as a consequence. In his commentary on this sutra, Vyasa says that it is not possible to satisfy the senses by enjoyments due to two reasons: one, attachment towards enjoyments becomes stronger and we then need still more enjoyments; two, the sense organs become more dexterous. Repeated sense enjoyments will only increase the attachment and skill of the sense organs. The condition of such a person becomes like the one who fearing the sting of a scorpion gets bitten by cobra.¹⁶ An unenlightened person who tries to come out of this mesh, only goes deeper. The more one tries, the more one is held fast. Desires are insatiable. 'The desires are not calmed down by their enjoyments, rather they gain strength like fire into which butter is poured.'¹⁷ The awareness of this fact comes to an ordinary person only when pleasure has been transmuted into pain; a yogi sees the pain even before enjoying a pleasure, because the yogi can clearly see the consequences at the first appearance of desire. Commentators say that the tastiest food that is poisoned is avoided by everyone. Poison can kill only once, but enjoyments kill one again and again. Therefore, all enjoyments should be kept under control. Attachment towards sense objects create fresh *kar-mashaya*, receptacle of karma, leading to more cycles of births and deaths.

Tapa-dubkha, pain from apprehension. When one is engaged in enjoyments some persons are favourable to us and others oppose us. Hence we end up favouring the former and disavouring the latter. This attitude creates dharma and *adharma* respectively. *Adharma* creates *karmashaya*, which fructifies as more births and deaths. Generally, when one is obstructed from enjoying things, resentment towards the obstructions grows. Moreover, enjoyment brings in diseases, and the fear of losing enjoyments also causes suffering. This *tapa-dubkha* is avoidable.

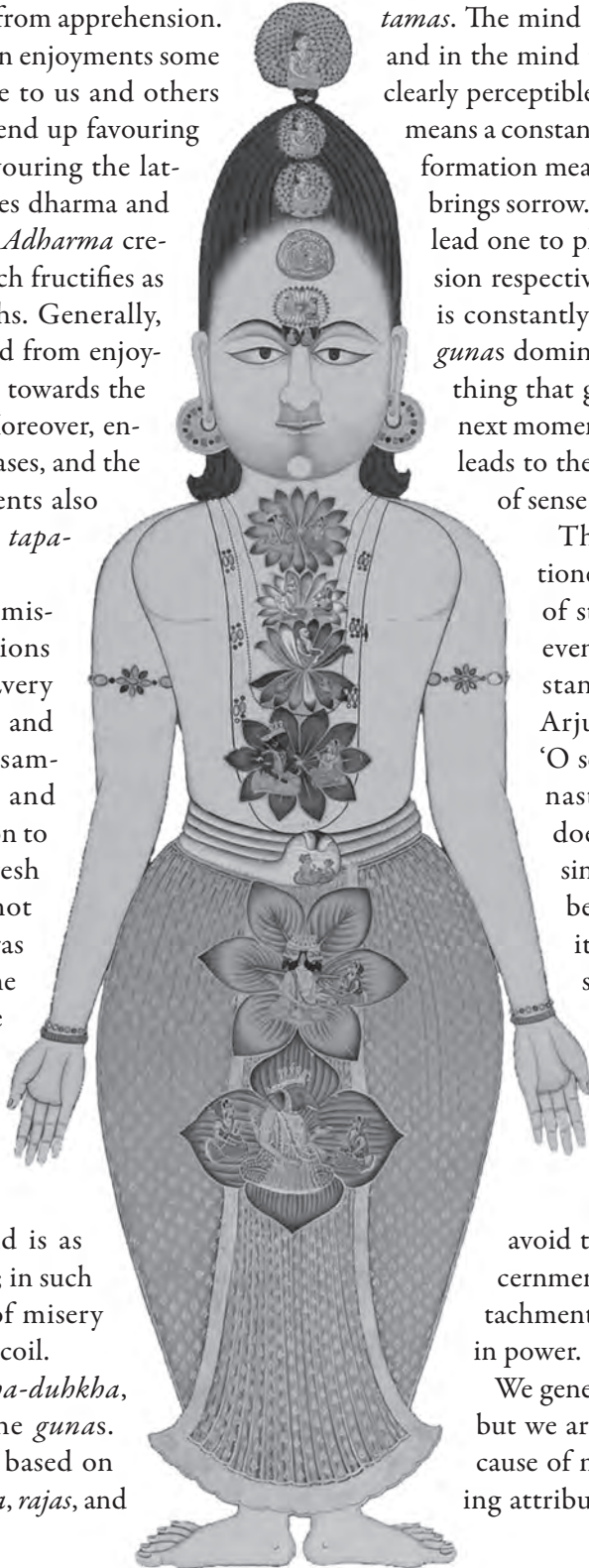
Samskara-dubkha, misery from the impressions of past experiences. Every experience of pleasure and pain leaves behind *samskaras*. These seeds and memories force a person to act, thereby adding fresh *karmashaya*. It does not give one rest. *Samskaras* are always arising in the mind. All *bhoga*, sense experience, brings pleasure and pain, either now or later. In yoga this is called 'an eternal stream of misery'. A yogi's mind is as sensitive as the eyeball; in such a mind even a mote of misery brings about violent recoil.

Guna-vritti-virodha-dubkha, counter actions of the *gunas*. The entire creation is based on the three *gunas*—*sattva*, *rajas*, and

tamas. The mind is also a part of nature, and in the mind the play of the *gunas* is clearly perceptible. The play of the *gunas* means a constant transformation; transformation means friction, and friction brings sorrow. *Sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* lead one to pleasure, pain, and delusion respectively. This internal tussle is constantly going on—one of the *gunas* dominating the other two. A thing that gives pleasure now, the next moment becomes painful. This leads to the insight that all objects of sense enjoyment are painful.

The four miseries mentioned above rob the person of strength. They push us, even unwillingly, into constant misery. In the Gita Arjuna asks Sri Krishna: 'O scion of the Vrishni Dynasty, impelled by what does this person commit sin even against one's wish, being engaged by force, as it were?'¹⁸ Bhagavan answers that this is due to desire and anger. We should understand which of the four miseries is impelling the mind and the body and learn to avoid them. This is called discernment and detachment. Detachment or renunciation brings in power.

We generally know what ails us, but we are unable to give up the cause of misery. The famous saying attributed to Duryodhana in



the *Pandava Gita*—or *Prapanna Gita*—says: ‘I know what dharma is, I am unable to follow it; I know what *adharma* is, but am unable to leave it.’¹⁹ In his case renunciation is weaker than discernment, which is the common experience of every sadhaka. If renunciation and discernment are not equally strong, the result is suffering and frustration. How strong the attachment towards sense enjoyments is can be experienced only by one who is trying to detach from them, not by those who are willingly engrossed in them. Vyasa discusses this point: ‘No enjoyment is possible without injury to another. ... Thus malevolence is also formed. The enjoyment of objects has, therefore, been called nescience.’²⁰ Real happiness comes through control of the senses. Vyasa also says: ‘The happiness gained on this earth through the enjoyment of desired objects, or supreme heavenly joy, is not even one-sixteenth part of the happiness caused by cessation of desires’ (225).

How can this renunciation be increased? Vedanta answers this by asking one to examine the world. The more minutely we observe the world, the greater will be our renunciation. The Upanishads say: ‘A brahmana should resort to renunciation after examining the worlds, acquired through karma, with the help of this maxim: “There is nothing (here) that is not the result of karma; so what is the need of performing karma?” For knowing that Reality he should go with a sacrificial faggot in hand, only to a teacher versed in the Vedas and absorbed in Brahman.’²¹

External obstacles can be avoided to a great extent, but we must know that internal obstacles cannot be avoided; one has to face and counter them. While proceeding on the path towards realization, a time comes when aspirants lack energy and enthusiasm and feel miserable and helpless. At this time one can derive internal strength and power by intelligently

following yogic practices, which are a wonderful and an unending source of power. It is only to such people that the grace of God comes in full measure. The *Yoga Sutra* teaches: ‘The result of tapasya is bringing power to the organs and the body by destroying the impurity.’²² Finally, the essence of yoga and its greatness can only be obtained by one diligent in it, as Vyasa says: ‘Yoga is to be known by yoga, and yoga itself leads to yoga, he who remains steadfast in yoga always delights in it.’²³



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Business and Ethical Leadership

Rhyddhi Chakraborty

To say that profit is a means to other ends and not an end in itself is not a semantic quibble, it is a serious moral point. A requirement is not a purpose—Charles Handy.¹

THE ABOVE QUOTATION DRAWS a line between requirement and purpose, means and ends. It indicates that the business activity should at best have an instrumental value, that is, it should serve as a means to some other end, but not as an end in itself.

The typical bottom-line approach of business makes us sceptical about its willingness to give due consideration to a greater well-being of society, for the relentless pursuit of profit by business appears to be in conflict with the well-being of society, as may be seen in numerous cases such as the Bhopal disaster in 1984, the Enron financial scam in 2001, the Satyam fraud in 2009, and so forth. This brings in the need to check the behaviour of business. In 2010–11 the Swiss research

firm Covalence released its annual ranking of the overall ethical performance of 581 multinational corporations spanning over seven years and making a qualitative and quantitative data analysis based on 45 criteria, which included labour standards, waste management, human rights records, and so on. It also incorporated media, industry, and NGO documents into its evaluation. The first, second, and third place winners were IBM, Intel, and HSBC, respectively. On the other hand, some of the least ethical companies listed were Missouri based agriculture giant Monsanto, Irish airline Ryanair, Swiss agriculture and chemicals company Syngenta, French Oil and Gas company Total.² For the same purpose of checking ethical business practice in 2013, Indian majors such as Tata Steel and Wipro have been placed among several other of the world's most ethical companies.³ The question now arises, what makes a company, organization, business an ethical one? What is ethical business?

The Concept of Ethical Business

The word 'business' is derived from the old English word *bisignis*, which means 'solicitude', 'attentiveness'. *Bisignis* is derived from the root *bysig*, which means 'active'. Therefore, in the very meaning of business lies the concept of activeness. And as this activeness involves actions, there comes the question of right and wrong action, the importance and need of ethics, and the clarification of the concept of business ethics.

In a nutshell, ethical business can be defined as the application of moral standards to organizations through which modern societies produce and distribute goods and services, analyse the behaviour of the people who work within these systems or organizations, and also apply the results of the analysis to the assortment of these systems or organizations—the study of this is referred to as business ethics.⁴ In another

terminology, ethical business is the business situations, activities, and decisions where issues of right and wrong are addressed.⁵ Now, a business operates in a society, and the domain of its right and wrong action is also extended towards society. Therefore, it can be said that the domain of performing ethical business is complex in nature, where the need of ethical analysis has a large extent in analysing and judging the behaviour of (i) the business with other social systems or institutions among which business operates—that is, systemic ethical analysis; (ii) the organization as a unit—ethical analysis of corporate governance, supply chain, and so on; and (iii) the individual/s within the organizations and their decisions—ethical analysis of individual behaviour. It can be said that ethical business means ethically coordinating the business as a whole.

Of these three, judging the individual behaviour in the business or organization is the core of ethical business, and this essay claims that it is the foundation of ethical business practices. In business individual behaviour is extended to one-to-one behaviour such as the employer-employee, the employee-employer, the employee-employee relations, and the like. This essay further claims that, of these types, the former is the most important for pursuing an ethical business, as it shows the efficient and just way of organizing human resources in the organization and sets the foundation of successful leadership. It is the individual as a leader in the organization who can misuse power or can efficiently and effectively manage the human resources to lead the business successfully and sustainably. In the context of successful and sustainable leadership comes the issue of ethics, as it guides the leader to perform in a right manner, to mould intentions for the betterment of society as a whole without cultivating a mere profit-making attitude.

According to Yukl, ethical leadership is an individual effort to (i) encourage ethical behaviour, (ii) stop unethical practices, (iii) build mutual trust and respect among diverse stakeholders of the organization, and (iv) find an integrative solution to resolve the conflicts of stakeholders' interests.⁶ In other words, an ethical leader is a person with a strong ethically built character, who has the insight of right and wrong, has the knowledge and capability of taking efficient and effective decisions at the right time and place, and has the awareness of core values to guide oneself and others in the organization as a team for building integrity and solidarity, as required by the business. An ethical leadership needs, therefore, an ethical character founded upon ethical intention and motive. It has been found that a number of factors play a role in that decision-making skill—age, gender, culture, education, psychological development, personal choice of values, to mention a few. Many times these factors have led to the practice of gender, culture, and status discrimination, thereby creating inequality of opportunity in the organization or business. With these factors playing a role in decision-making, there is a need to practise and cultivate good habits and intentions as well as to build an ethical character.

Lesson from the Indian Heritage

An ethical business should be guided by an ethical leader. And an ethical leader should have a compassionate mindset to be just to all. Delving into the Indian cultural heritage it is found that there are vast resources to guide the business in this manner. While Gandhiji shows the purpose of the ethical way of doing business, the role of business in society,⁷ Buddhism shows the way to build the appropriate relation between business and society. Swami Vivekananda conveys both approaches and shows the way of doing justice

to the individuals within the organization as well as to society.

In Gandhi's view, the relation of business with society is that of a trustee: business should work as the trustee of the people's wealth; it should create wealth for everyone by using the wealth of the people for the welfare of the people. Gandhi clarified: 'My requirements cannot be greater because I happen to be the son of a rich man. I cannot spend the money on my pleasures. The man who takes for himself only enough to satisfy the needs customary in his society and spends the rest for social service becomes a trustee.'⁸

In other words, the wealthier status of the business owners does not license them to indulge in more than the basic needs. After satisfying the socially allowable needs, a businessman ought to spend the wealth for the sake of society, with the help of virtues such as love and non-violence. Thus, in Gandhi's view, serving society, thinking of the societal well-being of all is an integral part of business activities.

While Gandhiji suggests the ideal relation between a business and society, Buddhism, a religio-cultural tradition of India, suggests how exactly to cultivate the compassionate character necessary for an ethical leadership to sustain business in society. The Buddhist theory of *paticca sammuppada*, dependent origination, suggests that all things and happenings in the world are causally and mutually related.⁹ In the context of business we find that the increase today in human trafficking; illegal mining; killing of animals for making perfumes, body oils, and other cosmetics; and above all discrimination in organizations based on gender, culture, and status are signs of a lack of insight into the concept of dependent relation between business and society.

Besides Gandhiji and Buddhism, Swami Vivekananda has brought a revolutionary attempt to change the mindset of all, including

that of business leaders. He has taught how to cultivate the character of a true leader in order to have practical solutions to real life problems of different types. The basis of Swamiji's thoughts circle around creating awareness of the evils of caste and gender discrimination as well as the importance of pursuing education. Therefore, there is a need to look into Swamiji's thoughts on these three vital issues for the betterment of business and the upliftment of society as a whole.

According to Swamiji, the caste system has gradually become an inherent social institution in Indian culture without any connection to religion. The caste system grew from the practice of the son following the business of his father. As generation succeeded generation, it became a hereditary trade. In the process, caste law has become the basis of the Indian social order, based on one's karma and the predominance in a person of any of the three *gunas*.

Swamiji once said that 'in India there are two great evils. Trampling on the women, and grinding the poor through caste restrictions.'¹⁰ He thus traced the degradation of India to the caste distinction and the continued negligence towards women and the masses. Let us cite one present-day example. In their report of 2011 on 'Captured by Cotton,' the India Committee of the Netherlands and the Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations mention that 60 per cent of the girls employed in cotton spinning mills in Tamil Nadu are not paid wages, and when paid it is below the minimum wage. They are often forced to work very long hours and are not allowed to leave the factory premises or hostel. This report conveys that the dignity, respect, and due right to the life and health of the girls working in these cotton mills are neglected for the sake of profit-making.

Swamiji further mentions that ignorance and the negligence of women's capabilities has

hindered their individual development and progress. Therefore, he recommends that women must have the freedom to receive as good an education as men and also the freedom to decide what reforms are necessary for themselves. Swamiji mentions that female students must be trained in both ethical and spiritual life.

It can be mentioned here that some of the leading organizations of India are striving to fulfil their societal contribution by providing a scope for education, especially in rural areas and for women. IT major Infosys, just to mention one example, has acknowledged that education is a fundamental right as enshrined in the Constitution of India and has taken initiatives to implement the largest rural education program in India—the Infosys Foundation has embarked on the 'Library for Every Rural School' program to donate books in the state of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, and Kerala and has set up 50,000 school libraries.¹¹

Ethical Leader's Aptitude

A leader who guides business in an ethical direction needs to possess a good perception both as a moral person and as a moral manager. As a moral person a leader should have certain ethical traits of right and wrong, engage in certain kinds of right behaviour, and make decisions based upon ethical principles. Some of the traits that are required for any ethical leadership are honesty, trustworthiness, and integrity. As a moral manager in the organization, a leader should incorporate values among the employees, which involve being a role model for ethical conduct, regular communication about ethics and values, and the use of the reward system to hold everyone accountable to the values and standards. Ethical leadership pays dividends in employee pride, commitment, and loyalty—all these are particularly important in a full employment economy in

which good companies strive to find and keep the best people.

According to N R Narayana Murthy, ex-CEO of Infosys, leadership is transformation, transformation of values within oneself and among others. As he shares some of his lessons, as given below, we find them to be similar to many of Swamiji's thoughts and teachings:

(i) Learn from experience. If the quality of the learning is high, the development gradient is steep, and, given time, one can find oneself in a previously unattainable place. One should also learn from failure. And success can indiscriminately reinforce all our prior actions.


(ii) In the settings of life one has to come across a number of chance events that are to be dealt with powerful intentional choices. It is this very quality of how we respond systematically to chance events that is crucial, as it expresses our true intentions and character.

(iii) There is a need to expand our mindset, so that it can lead us to embrace challenges, to learn from criticism. Open-minded people can reach higher levels of achievement.

(iv) There is also a need for self-knowledge. Self-reflection, greater awareness and knowledge of oneself is what ultimately helps develop a more grounded belief in oneself, one's courage, determination, and above all humility. These are the qualities that enable one to wear one's success with dignity and grace.

(v) It is important to remember that we are mere temporary custodians of the wealth that we all generate, whether it be financial, intellectual, or emotional. The best use of all wealth lies in sharing it with those less fortunate.¹²

In today's globalized world an executive's reputation for ethical leadership is more required, because more employees are working independently, off site, and without direct supervision. Therefore, it is inner values that can hold things

together, and these values are conveyed from the top to the bottom of the organization. 

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Mashan: Deity of the Rajbanshis

Subrata Sanyal

THE INDO-MONGOLOID tribes, which in the past entered India from the eastern and north-eastern fringes, today constitute the main population of north-east India. Over the centuries, and despite their absorption into mainland faiths, they tenuously maintain their autochthonous rituals and practices in order to remind themselves of their past. However, due to the marital interaction with other tribes, some of their habits and rituals have become an admixture of different characteristics, attracting many anthropologists to study their society.¹

Inflictions and Propitiations

The Rajbanshi, which means 'dynasty of kings', are people settled mostly in north Bengal and Assam. They are Indo-Mongoloid in affiliation, though they deviate from other tribes in varied degrees. Social and cultural anthropologists are not unanimous about their past; however, a common opinion refers to them as a type of Austric-Dravidian-Mongoloid race.² They spread through all the districts of north-west Bengal, west Assam, and northern areas of Bangladesh. Those on the Indian side adopted Hinduism in the past, whereas those in Bangladesh adopted Islam. In India, under the influence of Shankaradeva (1449?–1568), a saint and reformer of Assam, a majority of them became Vaishnavas, though the worship of Shiva is also prevalent among them. They have a rich tradition of worshipping their traditional deities, namely Bishahari, the serpent goddess; Jakha, yaksha or Kubera; Bhandani, the forest goddess or Durga; Mashan; Teesta-buri, the river Teesta; Mahakal, primitive form of Shiva;

Yatra-thakur, the journey god; Hukum-deo, the opinion god; Gram-thakur, the village god; and Madan-kam, the god of love, along with the gods and goddesses of Hinduism. Some rituals are performed by the womenfolk at home through their indigenous intonations and songs. The priests are called in for other forms of rituals and festivals. These priests are categorized into two classes. One is the *adhikaris*, entitled, who were entrusted with hexagonal metallic discs given by the erstwhile kings of Cooch Behar; they are entitled to perform traditional Hindu rituals, particularly those of the Vaishnava sect. The others are the *deusis*, or *deuris*, *mahans*, and *gunins*; these priests also act as exorcists and are entrusted with the pacification of local deities through tantric and occult rituals.

Following the tradition of Indo-Mongoloid tribes of all affiliations, the benevolent deities are worshipped by the Rajbanshis along with the propitiation of malevolent deities or evil spirits. The most important *deo*, deity, among the malevolent forms, frequently worshipped by the Rajbanshis, is Mashan. Mashan worship has attracted the attention of scholars with regard to its form, ritual, practice, idol characteristics, and the wide transformation it has undergone over the years.

The common belief among the Rajbanshis is that when Mashan casts its shadow on a person, it inflicts a disease upon that person. Eighteen forms of Mashan have been conceptualized, based on their abodes or the diseases they inflict on human beings.³ When people are affected by Mashan's touch or shadow, peculiar symptoms start developing in them, such as eating inedible

things—soil, charcoal, and so forth—rapid hair loss, bed-wetting, nocturnal emission, irregular gait, various types of diseases, tendency towards suicide, and so on. An exorcist is then called to diagnose the cause and the particular Mashan responsible for the disease.

Though the propitiation rituals vary from region to region, in lower Assam districts and Cooch Behar tantric practices and occultism are strictly followed. Proto-tantric incantations are followed in nearly all areas by exorcists to protect themselves and the afflicted. The rituals and things offered are simple for the appeasement of Mashan. Generally a Saturday, Tuesday, or new moon day is selected to perform the puja—away from residential areas—near bamboo plantations, forest fringes, or riverbanks. The idol is made of cork, depicting a warrior with a bow and arrow riding a horse. In Cooch Behar and lower Assam districts the horse is replaced by an elephant and sometimes, though very rarely, a pig. Nowadays, particularly in the places where *mashan-than*, the abode of Mashan, has been constructed, and Mashan is worshipped daily or once a year, the cork idol is replaced by a clay or stone image. Such idols show the deity as a seated pot-bellied muscled man, holding a mace in his left hand and with an elephant or pig at his side.

The articles required for the ritual include local varieties of bananas, curd, puffed rice, plantain stems, plantain leaves, small fish, and a pair of black pigeons. Before reaching the place earmarked for the ritual,

the *mahan* priest first protects himself through some specific incantations and postures, which are again repeated prior to the initiation of the rites called *deha-ban* and *sulki-ban*. A plantain leaf is then placed on the site, over which the symbol of Mashan is drawn and the cork image is placed on it. In some areas a bamboo stick is dug in the earth and the image is placed on either side of it. The afflicted person is seated at the left side of the exorcist. The ritual is initiated with the sprinkling of water over the afflicted, the idol, and the offerings. The *mahan* priest starts singing hymns, in the local Rajbanshi dialect, sequentially starting from *namani*, invitation; *basani*, offering a seat; *sirishhti*, narration of the story of creation; *shiva-vandana*, praising of Shiva; *mashan-vandana*, praising of Mashan; *chalan*, praying to Mashan to leave the place amicably; and *bhasan*, songs of immersion. Along with each hymn, certain postures are exhibited by the *mahan* priest. After *chalan*, he

The Mashan idol in the village Baghmara, Cooch Behar, West Bengal



again sprinkles water on the afflicted and asks him or her to leave the place immediately. After *bhasan* all the offerings and the cork image are wrapped with the plantain leaf and are thrown into the river or inside a bamboo plantation.

The methods to appease Mashan are identical throughout its hinterland, though the modes vary from region to region. In Assam the practices are mainly based on proto-tantric postures and occultism. In this region, even today, pigs are sacrificed along with a black goat and pigeons. In a few villages in Toofanganj, a sub-division of Cooch Behar district, and Goalpara district in Assam images of pigs can be found beside Mashan images, where permanent clay idols of the deity are worshipped daily. In the districts of Jalpaiguri and Dinajpur the rituals are more moderate, while the hymns are more elaborate. Two peculiar rituals of note have been reported from the Dinajpur district. In Rahatpur village of the Islampur sub-division of north Dinajpur district, the sacrificed black pigeon is roasted and all devotees present are asked to partake of it along with puffed rice.⁴ The other tradition requires that after partaking of roasted *chang*, a variety of fish, with puffed rice the devotees spit it out on the image.⁵ In Alokjhari, near Dinhat in Cooch Behar, the devotees offer an earthen elephant to the deity once their wishes are fulfilled.

Mashan rituals are also associated with the specialized *ban*, spell, practices, namely, *deha-ban*, *sulka-ban*, and *jharan-ban*. These are mostly tantric rituals and the incantations are uttered loudly before the deity. Not all *ban* rituals are divulged by the exorcists, as they are sacred to them.

Cultural Anthropology

Other than the rituals and practices followed by the Rajbanshis, the origin, the idol, and the transformation of the deity have drawn the

attention of researchers. Regarding the origin of the Mashan tradition, no conclusion can be drawn as the dates vary and various hypotheses abound, which are mostly abstruse and biased. The tradition reflects the early affiliation of the followers and practitioners. Among the Indo-Mongoloid tribes, Mech (Bodo)-Rabha groups are close neighbours of the Rajbanshis. Among the Rabha tribes we find the worship of Virabai, a frightful tantric deity without a particular form, who lives in the Peepal tree and is instrumental in inflicting awful diseases and symptoms among the people he comes across. Here also an exorcist is called in to pacify Virabai, who performs more vigorous tantric rituals. If the exorcist fails, he may meet a dreadful end. Given the traditions found in Cooch Behar and lower Assam districts, Virabai and Mashan are perceived to be akin to each other. Among the Rajbanshis of West Bengal districts, the tales of the Mashan are oriented around the deities Dharma and Kali. Mashan is conceived as their offspring.⁶ It is said that once Goddess Kali went to bathe in the river, where the god Dharma appeared; from their union was born Mashan. The birth tale and numerous other local versions lead us towards the Austric influence of the Mashan tradition.

The cork idol of Mashan is also an interesting subject of study. The Virabai of the Rabha tribes has no shape or image, but it has eighteen forms according to its different abodes. The common form of the Mashan—Ghora Mashan—is associated with the horse, an animal not available in the catchment areas of the Rajbanshis. The elders of the tribes heard from their forefathers that previously there was no Mashan idol. Notable researchers in this area confirm that in the past Mashan pictures used to be painted on silk or cotton cloth, and the same tradition is still being followed in Nepal and eastern Bhutan. Extensive research has revealed that prior

to the annexation of the Terai belt of the region known as Doars—the doors to Bhutan—these vast Himalayan foothills were the business areas of the Bhutanese, who used to employ local Rajbanshis to collect revenue and assist during trade. Bhutanese and Tibetan traders used this area as their trade route. In the Bhanger-Hat village of the Maynaguri Police Station of Jalpaiguri district, one clay image—locally known as Bhot-deo, Bhutanese deity—is found to be worshipped at present. The idol is a male figure with a turban, wearing shoes, and riding a horse. The cork image of Ghora Mashan also shows the figure in the same fashion. The erstwhile painting on silk or cotton scarf also points towards the Bhutanese-Tibetan tradition, where sketches on silk *thongkha*, scarf, are common. But the identification of Mashan or Bhot-deo with the Tibetan tradition is yet to be discovered.

The Tibetan connection cannot be introduced without mentioning the Bon traditions in Tibet. This old religion of animism and shamanism was prevalent in Tibet before Mahayana Buddhism entered there in the seventh century. Bon rituals include worship, iconography, and meditation on peaceful and wrathful deities, apart from the distinction between enlightened deities and those who are still on Earth. This religion was followed by Tibetans for protection from the wrathful spirits and for prosperity. The Tibetans, like all people, were fascinated by magic and occult powers. They had assiduously cultivated these powers from ancient times. Tibetans view their country as the abode of countless supernatural powers and spirits. They divide the universe into three parts: the sky, the earth, and the lower regions. Each division has its own groups of gods and evil spirits.⁷ The list of evil spirits is very long. When Mahayana Buddhism entered Tibet, it overcame the Bon religion, but later the age-old beliefs and traditions slowly crept back in.

When we talk about the cork image of Mashan, we find similarities with the spirit *tsen* of the Tibetan tradition. The Bhot-deo of Bhanger-Hat is none other than a malevolent deity, the *tsen* of the Tibetan traders, who during their trading sojourns in these areas introduced their conception and affiliation of *tsen* into the image of Mashan.

Over the years there has been a concerted effort among the learned Rajbanshis to establish an affinity between Mashan and Hindu deities. Once a ritual meant for healing the diseased by pacifying Mashan, has now been transformed into a preventive initiative to worship the deity for a prosperous life. What was previously performed only after an affliction, is now performed annually in March-April or on Divali Kali Puja. In a number of places, like Alokjhari near Dinahata and Baghmara near Mathabhanga, in Cooch Behar, permanent temples have been constructed and daily worship is performed along with chanting Sanskrit hymns. The common belief nowadays is that Mashan is a distorted form of *smashan*, cremation ground, and the deity is none other than the presiding deity of the cremation grounds. Hence, the clay images show a similarity with that of Shiva with his matted hair.

Though the annual Mashan festival is observed with fanfare among the Rajbanshis over a vast area, the original traditions, tales, and rituals are on the verge of extinction. Learned *mahans* with knowledge in *ban* and other occult practices are almost extinct, and the local brahmana priests are taking their places. Sanskrit hymns are superseding Rajbanshi tales and hymns. Though still prevalent in areas of lower Assam, the traditions on the western side of the region have almost disappeared. The absorption of Mashan heritage into a higher form is slowly taking place, as the old worshippers are socially and religiously evolving.



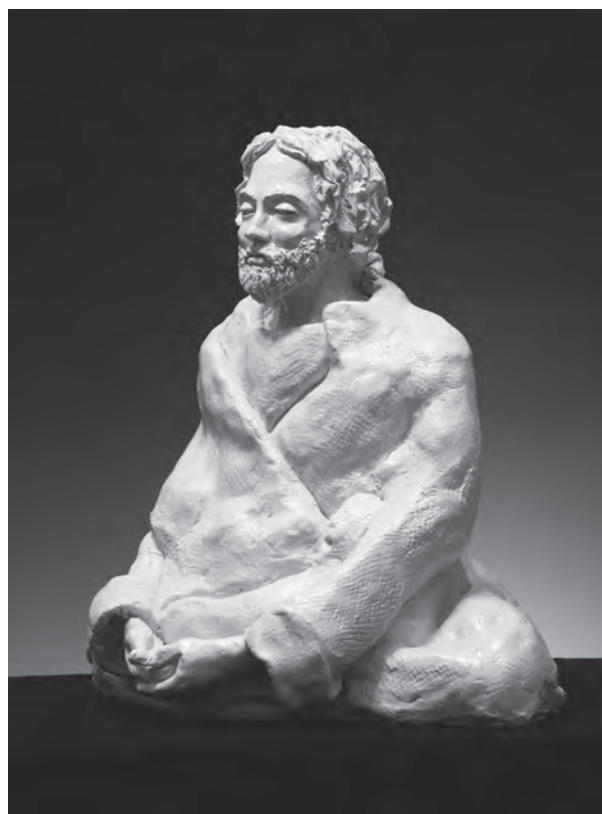
(References on page 403)

Jesus in the Eyes of Vivekananda

Father Anthony Susai Raj

VIVEKANANDA WAS ONE of the great spiritual personalities of contemporary India who made a remarkable impact on the world with his teachings. Through his unique efforts, he tried to bring the people of the world, divided by race, culture, religion, and so on, into a common fraternity. One of the admirable qualities of Vivekananda was his openness to accept truth and appreciate goodness in other religions. He had great respect and reverence for all god-like men and women without regard to religion and country. He says: 'Our salutations go to all the past Prophets whose teachings and lives we have inherited, whatever might have been their race, clime, or creed! Our salutations go to all those Godlike men and women who are working to help humanity, whatever be their birth, colour, or race! Our salutations to those who are coming in the future—living Gods—to work unselfishly for our descendants.'¹

Vivekananda had great respect and reverence for Christ too. His affection and admiration is expressed beautifully in his own words: 'Had I lived in Palestine, in the days of Jesus of Nazareth, I would have washed his feet, not with my tears, but with my heart's blood!' (9.423). From a young age Vivekananda was inspired by the noble teachings of Christ. During his *parivrajya*, wandering, days he carried with him a copy of Thomas À Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ* and often quoted from it. He later even translated the first six chapters of the book into Bengali. In December 1886, on Christmas Eve,



'Jesus Meditating', by Bob Clyatt (2011)

Narendra—Vivekananda's pre-monastic name—and eight of his brother disciples took a vow of living a life of self-sacrifice and dedication before a sacred fire at Antpur, West Bengal.

Narendra began to tell the story of Jesus, beginning with the mystery of his birth, through to his death and resurrection. Through his eloquence, the brother-disciples could catch something of the apostolic fervour that had impelled Paul to spread the Christian gospel far and wide in the face of adversities. Narendra charged them to become Christs themselves, and so aid in the redemption of the world; to realize God and to deny themselves as Jesus had done. Standing there before the sacred fire, their faces lit up by the flames, the crackling of the wood the sole disturbing sound, they took the vows of renunciation before God and one another.²

Vivekananda shared his deep understanding of Christ during his various talks in India and

abroad. I would like to present a few of his impressions on Christ based mainly on *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*.

As a Great Soul

Vivekananda considers Jesus Christ as a gigantic soul who has had a great influence on the world even to this day. 'And the three years of his ministry were like one compressed, concentrated age, which it has taken nineteen hundred years to unfold, and who knows how much longer it will yet take! ... But mark this giant that came; centuries and ages pass, yet the energy that he left upon the world is not yet stretched, nor yet expended to its full. It goes on adding new vigour as the ages roll on.'³

Seeing the works of Jesus, which had a powerful impact on the world, Vivekananda considers him as endowed with a gigantic will. He says: 'The gigantic will which Buddha and Jesus threw over the world, whence did it come? Whence came this accumulation of power? It must have been there through ages and ages, continually growing bigger and bigger, until it burst on society in a Buddha or a Jesus, even rolling down to the present day' (1.30-1). Vivekananda had the strong conviction that Jesus Christ was a spiritual leader who worked selflessly for humanity. He said that Jesus 'was a soul! Nothing but a soul—just working a body for the good of humanity; and that was all his relation to the body' (4.145).

The deeds and words of Jesus on earth, such as 'I and my Father are one', brought humanity closer to the Divine. Vivekananda analyses these words and considers that Jesus had realized that he is in essence God himself. All that is real in him is also in God; all that is real in God is in him as well. Further, as Jesus realized that he was united with God, he tried to unite humanity with the Divine through his words, deeds, and prayers. Vivekananda quotes a prayer of Jesus

that brings humanity together to be united with God: 'Father, just as I am one with you, so make them all one with me' (1.381). He continues: 'He [God] is nearer to us than even our senses, nearer to us than our own thoughts; it is in and through Him that we see and think. To see anything, I must first see Him. To see this wall I first see Him, and then the wall, for He is the eternal subject. Who is seeing whom? He is here in the heart of our hearts' (ibid.). Jesus Christ, who was divine and at the same time human, had the ability to correctly understand and help humanity by building a bridge between divinity and humanity. 'The Trinitarian Christ is elevated above us; the Unitarian Christ is merely a moral man; neither can help us. The Christ who is the Incarnation of God, who has not forgotten His divinity, that Christ can help us, in Him there is no imperfection. These Incarnations are always conscious of their own divinity; they know it



from their birth' (7.4). Thus, the gulf between God and humanity was bridged by Christ.

With the help of avatars like Jesus humanity needs to unite with God, like he was united with God. This is the aim and end of every religion. 'When the primal element is discovered in chemical science, the work of the chemist will be finished. When unity is discovered, perfection in the science of religion is reached, and this was attained thousands of years ago. Perfect unity is reached when man says, "I and my Father are one"' (6.136).

Union with God enables us to be united with fellow human beings and respect and recognize God in people. The realization of God in the life of Jesus and the awareness of the presence of God in human beings directs one's heart to love and respect all. Seeing God in every person, 'working through all hands, walking through all feet, and eating through every mouth. In every being He lives, through all minds He thinks. He is self-evident, nearer unto us than ourselves. To know this is religion, is faith' (1.341).

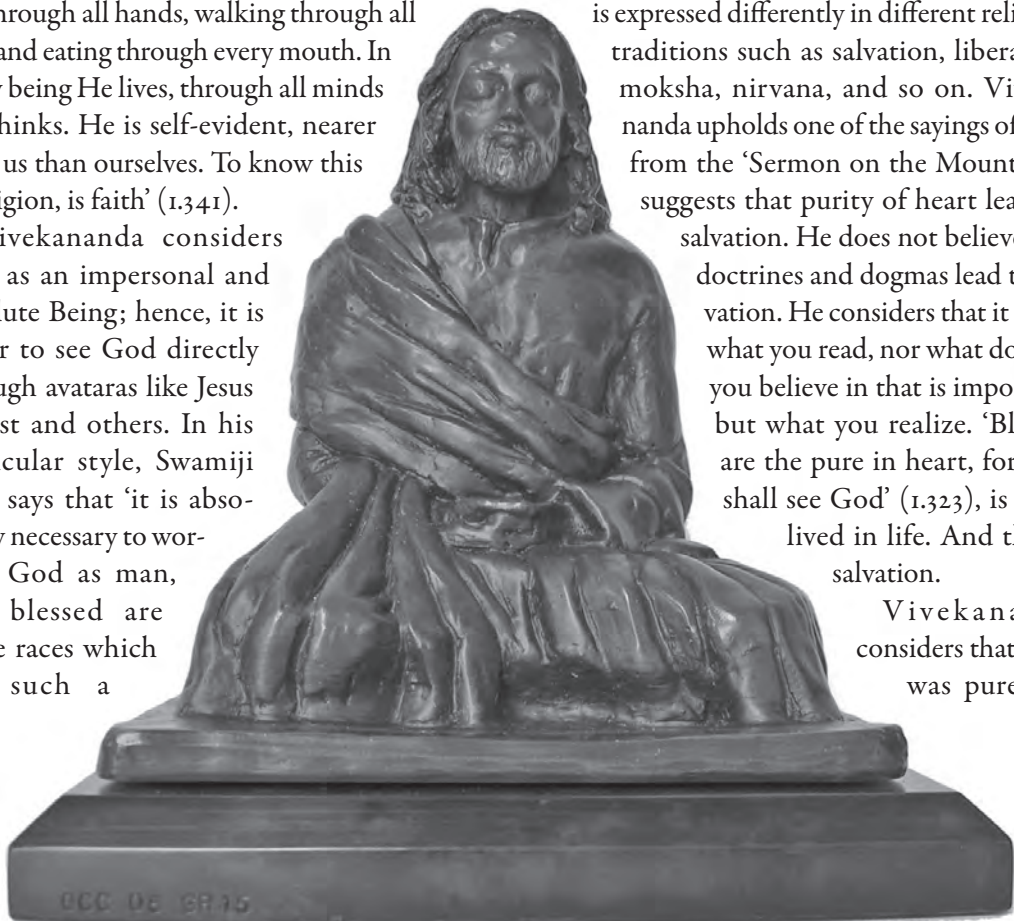
Vivekananda considers God as an impersonal and absolute Being; hence, it is easier to see God directly through avatars like Jesus Christ and others. In his particular style, Swamiji even says that 'it is absolutely necessary to worship God as man, and blessed are those races which has such a

"God-man" to worship' (4.31). 'Christians have such a God-man in Christ; therefore cling close to Christ. This is the natural way to see God; see God in man' (4.31). Vivekananda also urges Christians not to limit themselves only to Christ, but recognize the avatars of other religions as well. All avatars are the 'Christs', the 'Buddhas' of the world and represent God in the form of human beings. 'These Teachers of all teachers represent God Himself in the form of man. They are much higher; they can transmit spirituality with a touch, with a wish, which makes even the lowest and most degraded characters saints in one second' (4.29).

Jesus's Way to Salvation

The aim and end of every spiritual leader is to assist his followers in attaining freedom, which is expressed differently in different religious traditions such as salvation, liberation, moksha, nirvana, and so on. Vivekananda upholds one of the sayings of Jesus from the 'Sermon on the Mount' and suggests that purity of heart leads to salvation. He does not believe that doctrines and dogmas lead to salvation. He considers that it is not what you read, nor what dogmas you believe in that is important, but what you realize. 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God' (1.323), is to be lived in life. And that is salvation.

Vivekananda considers that Jesus was pure and



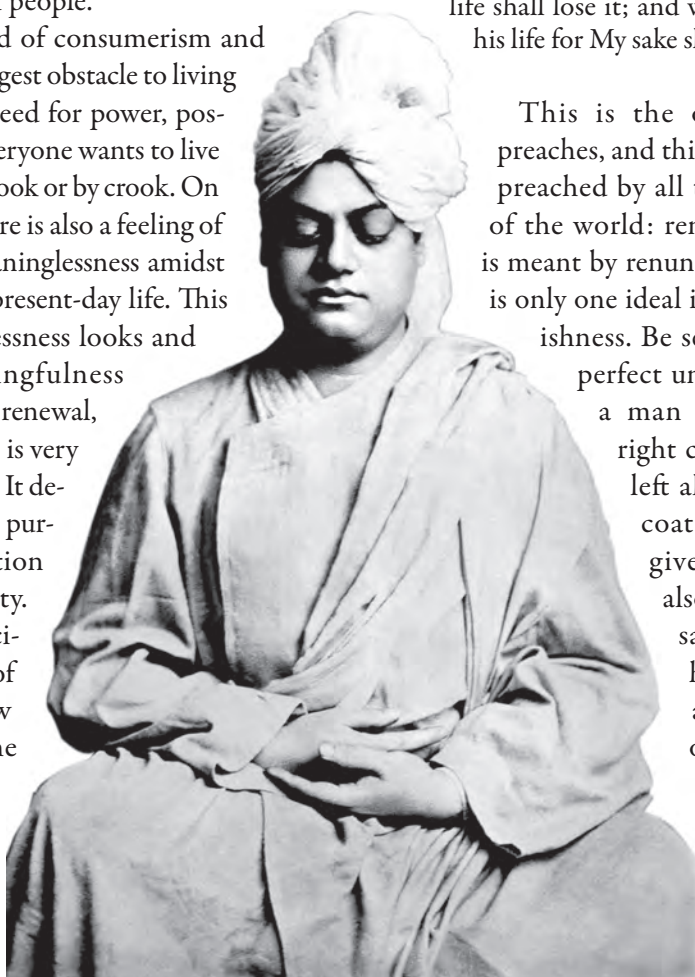
selfless to the extent of sacrificing his own life for the salvation of humanity. This self-sacrificing nature of Jesus was the way to salvation for millions of people. Vivekananda considers the great secret of true success, of true happiness: "The man who asks for no return, the perfectly unselfish man, is the most successful. It seems to be a paradox. Do we not know that every man who is unselfish in life gets cheated, gets hurt? Apparently, yes. "Christ was unselfish, and yet he was crucified." True, but we know that his unselfishness is the reason, the cause of a great victory—the crowning of millions upon millions of lives with the blessings of true success' (2.5). Thus Vivekananda considers that purity and selflessness lead to the salvation and liberation of millions of people.

In today's world of consumerism and materialism the biggest obstacle to living a spiritual life is greed for power, position, and lucre. Everyone wants to live a luxurious life by hook or by crook. On the other hand, there is also a feeling of emptiness and meaninglessness amidst all the luxuries of present-day life. This state of meaninglessness looks and longs for meaningfulness through a spiritual renewal, though of course it is very difficult to achieve. It demands tremendous purity and renunciation to attain spirituality. Purity and renunciation are the basis of all religions. How can one make the

spirit pure? By renunciation. It is substantiated by Vivekananda's citation from the Bible:

A rich young man asked Jesus, 'Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?' And Jesus said unto him, 'One thing thou lackest; go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasures in heaven: and come, take up thy cross, and follow Me.' And he was sad at that saying and went away grieved; for he had great possessions. We are all more or less like that. The voice is ringing in our ears day and night. In the midst of our pleasures and joys, in the midst of worldly things, we think that we have forgotten everything else. Then comes a moment's pause and the voice rings in our ears: 'Give up all that thou hast and follow Me.' 'Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life for My sake shall find it' (4.149).

This is the one ideal Christ preaches, and this has been the ideal preached by all the great prophets of the world: renunciation. 'What is meant by renunciation? That there is only one ideal in morality: unselfishness. Be selfless. The ideal is perfect unselfishness. When a man is struck on the right cheek, he turns the left also. When a man's coat is carried off, he gives away his cloak also' (1.150). All great saints and prophets have expressed it and have carried it out in their lives.



‘Christ was a Sannyasin, and his religion is essentially fit for Sannyasins only. His teachings may be summed up as: “Give up”; nothing more’ (6.109). Jesus renounced everything to the extent of not owning his own home to rest. Vivekananda quotes a verse from the Bible highlighting the renunciation of Christ: “The foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath nowhere to lay his head.” That is what Christ says as the only way to salvation; he lays down no other way. Let us confess in sackcloth and ashes that we cannot do that. We still have fondness for “me and mine” (4.145).

Though the modern world is developing rapidly in technology and infrastructure, the evils of corruption, injustice, fundamentalism, terrorism, and ecological degradation are also on the increase. There is a deep-seated desire in the human heart to come out of these evils. When Vivekananda was asked the way to come out of the evils of the world, he suggested renunciation, like that of Christ. Wisdom is in renunciation, that is, to make God our all in all. ‘Be a true Christian ... like Christ, renounce everything and let the heart and soul and body belong to Him and Him alone. All this nonsense which people have built round Christ’s name is not His teaching. He taught to renounce. He never says the earth is an enjoyable place. And your time has come to get rid of all vanities—even the love of children and husband—and think of the Lord and Him alone’ (9.121).

Vivekananda considers Jesus Christ as one of the greatest teachers of religion, who touched and transformed the lives of many. He helped people to realize that they are children of God and part of the Kingdom of God. With his marvellous vision, Jesus found that every man and woman, whether Jew or Gentile, whether rich or poor, whether saint or sinner, was the embodiment of the same undying spirit as himself.

Therefore, his whole life was a clarion call for people to realize their own spiritual nature. He asked them to give up the superstitious mentality that one is poor and low. Think not that you are trampled upon and tyrannized as if you were slaves, for within you is something that can never be killed. ‘The Kingdom of Heaven is within us. He is there. He is the soul of all souls. See Him in your own soul. That is practical religion. That is freedom’ (4.246). Vivekananda observed that the life of Jesus guided people to realize that they are all children of God, irrespective of caste, colour, and race.

Vivekananda also admires Jesus’s preaching of loving one’s enemies and doing good to them. The great teacher practised the same when he was crucified. He says: ‘Of all the great religious teachers the world has known, only Lao-tze, Buddha, and Jesus transcended the golden rule and said, “Do good to your enemies”, “Love them that hate you”’ (7.96).


Vivekananda also brings out the striking similarity between Sri Krishna and Christ. He says:

There is a great deal of similarity between the lives of Jesus and Krishna. A discussion is going on as to which borrowed of the other. There was the tyrannical king in both places. Both were born in a manger. The parents were bound in both cases. Both were saved by angels. In both cases all the boys born that year were killed. The childhood is the same. ... Again, in the end, both were killed. Krishna was killed by accident; he took the man who killed him to heaven. Christ was killed, and blessed the robber and took him to heaven. There are a great many similarities in the teaching of the New Testament and the Gita’ (1.444).

He comes to a conclusion saying that it is God himself who became Christ, Sri Krishna, Buddha, and all great teachers (ibid.). Further, Vivekananda believes that these great souls come

again and again, take a human form and help humankind. They come of their own free will and cannot help having tremendous spiritual power. When they come many people are dragged into the whirlpool of spirituality, and the vibration goes on and on until all humankind is liberated and the play in this world is over. These teachers of humankind are the real leaders, are the universal gurus.

I consider that Vivekananda is also one of the gigantic souls who enlightened the world through his thoughts, words, and deeds. The quality that we need to inculcate in ourselves is openness to Truth without any regard to religious distinctions. As given in the Rig Veda: 'Let good thoughts come to us from all sides.' Vivekananda was willing to open his heart, to sharpen his mind, and listen to great teachers

and prophets of the world without any regard to creed, country, and race. His knowledge of Jesus, of his teachings, and of Christianity are indeed remarkable. He was generous enough to appreciate and assimilate the great virtues of Christ and, at the same time, had the courage and sincerity to challenge some Christian dogmas, doctrines, and practices. We see that Swami Vivekananda loved Christ and embodied the values taught by him. 

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Jesus washing a disciple's feet



Eternal Words

Swami Adbhutananda

Compiled by Swami Siddhananda; translated by Swami Sarvadevananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

PEOPLE TAKE ADVANTAGE if you are very soft-hearted. Do you show great endurance in your work? There is a limit to such endurance. It is very bad to work begrudgingly. It brings harm to both sides. Whatever work you do, do it with love. If you can't, don't do it. If you do any act begrudgingly, the effect of that work will bring enormous suffering.

Do not go on talking about me. There is no gain in that. Try to stay busy talking about the Master and Swamiji. Do it day and night. That will bring you peace. For whoever becomes engrossed in talking about the lives of the Master and Swamiji will surely be benefitted.

A boy of ten or twelve used to secretly perform the worship of the Master. Look at the samskara! There was some karma remaining. That is why he was born in the family of these people. That karma is finished; therefore, he left the body. Such people are called *shapa-bhrashtha*, fallen due to some curse.

Can a sadhu forget? A worldly person forgets. In the heart of a holy man there is selfless love. That is why he remembers everyone. But the minds of worldly people are filled with selfishness. They make an outward show of love to one through whom they can fulfil their selfish goals. But as soon as their need is satisfied, they forget. This is the nature of worldly people. But there are honest householders also who try to be selfless.

Whenever some new item is brought home, one should accept it only after offering it to one's

Ishta Devata, Chosen Ideal, and guru. The foremost part of everything belongs first to one's Ishta Devata and to the guru. One who does not give something to the one who is entitled to it is a thief. After making your offering to your Ishta Devata and your guru, feed the poor and helpless. They are all Narayana in the form of the poor. After that, you take some. This is the dharma of an honest man.

Do not feel any remorse in giving someone food, even if that person has committed many wrongs. They come to you because you have something. They want to eat a little. Who would come to you if you did not have anything? It is your fortune that sadhus and fakirs, the lowly and poor come to you expecting food. This is the instruction of the great souls: if anyone comes to you expecting food, do not ever turn them away. If you cannot fill their stomachs, then, by looking upon them as Narayana, try to worship with whatever you have. 'Who knows in which garb one may meet God?' Please remember these words of Tulsidas.

Only that person who gives monetary help can be called a good person. The one who does not is called bad. Such is the condition of the mind. It is very difficult to have spiritual growth with this type of mind. When the devotees used to come to the Master, if anyone helped Hriday, Hriday would say: 'Uncle, that man is very good.' And when the young Bhavanath and others would come, Hriday would say: 'Uncle, why do you talk to them? What will come from talking

to those penniless boys? There is no gain in that.' The Master could understand everything.

God does not dwell in the midst of factionalism. The Master openly said this and showed, by his very life, that all religions are true. Moreover, these people are fighting over who is great and who is small. See how mean is their understanding!

It is very difficult to put to proper use the money earned by dishonest means.

The guru may be the same, but the disciples are different because of their karmas. For example, the karma of Girish babu and the karma of Swamiji are different. There cannot be any similarity between the karma of one and that of the other, but their goal [God-realization] may be the same. Oh human being! Be honest, by that alone you will enjoy happiness.

It is good to be humble to everyone. Especially, you should show humility and tenderness to a sadhu, to your guru, and to your Ishta Devata. They can understand your mental attitude. It is not good to display too much humility with others. Not understanding your mental attitude, people will create trouble for you.

Maharshi Devendranath Tagore used to spend the whole night in meditation while staying at Almora. He had so much money and respect from everyone. Is it an easy matter to keep one's mind on God in the midst of these? Maharshi Devendranath, Keshab babu, Vijay Goswami, and others belong to the class of acharyas.

There is no sin like a financial debt. As there is no certainty when the body will go, it is not good to remain carefree after becoming indebted. It is very bad to give up the body when one is in debt. As far as you can, do not incur debt.

Whatever work you do, do it after a little analysis. If you can, consult with five others. One has to repent at the end if one does work according to one's own whims. Later one thinks, 'Why did I do such a thing?'

It is very good to read out the Bhagavata, especially in places of pilgrimage like Kashi. Not going anywhere else, it is good if one reads at the Tilbhandeshwar Mahadeva Temple. Whom else will you read out for? Vishvanath will hear you. What more greater fortune is there? What does it matter whether people come? Whoever comes will be benefitted. Of course, if the

*Prayer hall of the
Tilbhandeshwar Mahadeva
Temple, Varanasi*



audience becomes large, the enthusiasm of the reader increases. This can be understood very well. When your reading is over, give the prasad of Tilbhandeshwar to those who have come to hear the sermon. Thus your daily offering of food to God and the partaking of prasad by the listener will both be accomplished. At the end of your reading of the Bhagavata, if you are able to, you should make good preparations and feed the sadhus, brahmanas, and poor.

The Master used to say that there are many obstacles to good work. Surely there will remain some anxiety until, by his grace, the work is adequately finished. Don't you see how many obstacles come together? It is a matter of joy if, by God's grace, good activities are completed in a proper manner. One who delays good work while waiting for an auspicious time will never accomplish that work in the future. Even a little good work will not go in vain. Know that God's grace is upon one who does good work. My dear, can one accomplish good work only if one has money? Then, rich people would have been the first to succeed. One has acquired good karma in this life or in a prior life; that is the reason why good work is getting done. For this reason only one has to accept one's samskaras, which are the fruit of one's past actions. There are such people who start assessing the expenses whenever there is a question of performing some good work. They factor how much money will be spent! But for worthless expenditures, they cannot even control the ways in which their money is squandered. They cannot even tally that!

In the past people were so honest that they used to celebrate thirteen festivals in twelve months such as Holi, the celebration of Mother Durga, and so on. Moreover, they used to feed the poor and the afflicted until they were full. There was no concern for money. There was no lack of food. There was tremendous enthusiasm.

Now, see what you have become! You don't get a square meal to eat. How can you conduct all those events? Nowadays such [generous] people are not seen much. Occasionally, when honest people are born, ample materials are available, and one eats very well and gives profusely to the poor. All these things are God's will. A person has no power to do anything—nothing at all. What good will it do if one only talks big?

One should not be angry while eating food. If one eats with anger, one's health deteriorates.

For many days I stayed at the house of Ramakrishna babu, the son of Balaram. He didn't trouble me with useless talk for even a day. People ask a sadhu to give advice and expect much from a sadhu.

The Master used to call the family of Balaram babu 'my family'. Balaram babu's father used to live at Vrindavan. After the Vaishnavas had eaten, he would eat their leftover food as prasad. When he used to call for his servants, who were from Orissa, none could find a trace of them. They chatted and smoked tobacco on the ground floor. After repeatedly calling, they would say, 'Sir, I am coming' and would appear before the master with *japa-malas*, rosaries, in their hands. Seeing the *japa-malas* in the servants' hands Balaram babu's father would say: 'My dear, remain as you were.' That was because he used to think that they were taking the name of God. See how guileless he was! But the rascal servants were cheating him. The servants thought: 'My master will be very happy if I act like this. And also, by acting like this, I can avoid my work.' The master was very happy seeing them. He used to think: 'Okay, let there be some loss of work. They are following the instruction of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu by repeating the name of God.' Such people are really fortunate and guileless.

Generally, if people have money, they become haughty. But in the dress and movements

of these people [like Balaram's father], there is no trace of such expression. Really this happens if one becomes a true Vaishnava.

Why does a sadhu not stay near a householder? Disease and bereavement, thoughts and worries, different types of suffering and restlessness in the family—all of these and other problems are constantly going on in the family of a householder. They want to impose all of this maya on the sadhu. Then the sadhu has to remain more or less with such thoughts, giving up his own reflections on God. One will have to take some share in their pleasure and pain if one eats their food and stays near them. Renouncing one's own family, at the end, one has to spend one's life in the thought of another's family. For this reason the sadhus stay in solitude, giving up associating with people. They do not come in contact with any householder. They eat alms from different homes and live in solitude. Then they develop perfect dependence upon God and escape from the maya of the householders. Daily staying close to the householders, their faith and devotion become diminished. This is the bad result of the association with sense objects. Of course, there are many devoted families among householders. Such persons are far greater than ordinary householders, because one can hear God's name on their lips and they discuss holy matters. But for worldly people there is no other talk except real property, money, and wealth. A sadhu should not stay with them even if they are honest.

So long as one has a body, one should eat. You can do as much meditation and japa as you can if you have some provision for simple food. If there are no means of getting food, one has to think on that matter and this becomes an obstacle to one's contemplation of God.

It is exceedingly difficult to serve a sadhu. One must do that with enormous trust, respect,

and faith. Nowadays people do not even mention feeding and clothing the sadhus, yet they ask a sadhu to stay with them. What food will he eat if he stays? There is no certainty of that. They ask the sadhu to stay for the purpose of mere chattering. They make him talk for many hours and do not show any trace of interest in following his instruction. They do not even invite the sadhu for a meal.

The Master used to say that in this Kali Yuga people's lives are utterly focused on food. They may not get or eat food for a few days, but they will have to eat later; otherwise the body will waste away.

Any means by which self-development occurs can be called the right understanding. Anything that causes one's self-decline is certainly wrong understanding. One who is honest and truthful attains Self-knowledge.

The Master used to dislike those sadhus who dispensed medicine or used wooden sandals. These are signs of an ego. You have become a sadhu to call upon God. If one suffers from disease, there are doctors and practitioners of herbal medicine. Of course, it is a great work to serve the poor selflessly by providing them with medicines.

No one can be as minute as God, nor can anyone be vaster than God. Wherever God [as an avatara] goes, everyone feels joy. Sri Ramachandra went to the forest. Everyone in the forest was overjoyed. The trees were bearing fruits, flowers were blooming, and everyone was in bliss.

There cannot be any dharma by following a sudden wave of excitement. After a few days one is bound to give it up. But for those who want God in right earnest, they will not give up their path even if they are faced with hundreds of obstacles. Now the Master's photo is visible in every home. Do you accept the Master? Vivekananda accepted him. If you honour him, you should

follow his instructions. Then only I shall know that you earnestly crave for dharma.

As is one's capacity, so much will be his receptivity. Can one contain more? That is the reason why there are differences in the levels of understanding from one person to another.

The Master used to forbid others to incur debts. He would call that landlord devoid of the grace of Goddess Lakshmi who sells his estate. When one must look after land and property, what is the use of being lazy? One must collect one's legitimate dues even by pressing the person's chest under one's knees. Why will one release someone who can pay? But the person who really has nothing to give should be exempted.

Sri Ramachandra descended [as an avatara] to take away the burdens of the entire world. It is a great fortune to live at his birthplace.

Bharata had not the least doubt about Sri Ramachandra. Bharata knew Sri Rama was God himself and had taken a human body to bring about the welfare of the world. He gave up kingly pleasures and placing the wooden sandals of Sri Rama on the throne he fanned them with the *chamara*, whisk. How much austerity he performed! Bharata had great renunciation.

It is better to make spiritual progress gradually. If one makes great progress in one stroke, it doesn't linger for long. If one engages in heavy kirtan, one's mind will rise up very fast. But however much one dances and weeps, afterwards, one is just the same person as before!

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Sri Ramachandra, Sri Krishna—all the avatars gave us so many instructions. Oh dear! Try to accept their lessons and act accordingly. Surely you will benefit from it. How much severe tapasya the avatars underwent for the edification of humankind! If one imitates their actions, it will bring auspiciousness.

He who can think of another's child as his own will become godlike.

Sadhus meditate and do japa, live on alms, and endure austerities so that their worldly tendencies will leave them.

One cannot understand the suffering of others unless one suffers.

The mind sinks down by eating the food of a person steeped in worldliness.

Is there anything like the worship of Shiva? What remains impossible if Shiva becomes gracious? To teach humanity Sri Ramachandra and Sri Krishna received Shiva's grace when they incarnated. Oh dear! Worship Shiva if you seek your own welfare. He bestows knowledge, devotion, and liberation. If one worships Shiva, that which could not possibly happen in this world will happen—one becomes like Shiva!

That is verily an ideal family where there are no disputes or conflicts. The members of that family are continuously engaged in discussing dharma, the kind of food offerings to be given to God, and how best to perform the worship. A person suffers due to samskaras. One suffers as a result of one's prior samskaras. Others again suffer due to the samskaras of the family in which they are born. For the son of a rich man there is no lack of anything. Yet he steals. The samskaras do not leave without the grace of God and the blessings of the guru. One suffers in this world because of the samskaras of wealth, honour, property, dishonour, and the like. If God wishes, he can wipe out these samskaras just this minute. A person will not realize God if his or her samskaras do not disappear.

To maintain the family each member should earn a little. Then the family runs well. If the family is dependent on one person, the family cannot manage well. It is the same with religion. Those belonging to this path will discuss religion among them and correct one another's mistakes. This is a great help from the standpoint of religion.

Can mere ideas alone give one religion? You say God is infinite. Just think how little you are in comparison to that infinitude!


If you do not marry, you will enjoy a life eating and sleeping well. There will be no lack of good food and dress. Eating well, you will be able to sleep without worries. If you marry, you will suffer. If the property is divided, how much

of it will come into your share? Over and above all this, should you marry and have children, what will you feed them? If you can lead a pure life without marrying, you will get joy. How much happiness there is in a 'free life'! Getting a taste of that but once, does one wish to be bound anymore?

(To be continued)

(Continued from page 377)

Religious life becomes somehow easy if we come under the protective care of Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji. We are then protected from all our scattering and conflicting thoughts, which do not succeed in affecting or penetrating our mind. For example, by resolving not to criticize others and not to look at the faults of others we can find mental peace. Such a mind does not get troubled or become restless very easily. The spiritual path shown by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in this age applies to all people. They have showed us how to value our lives, how to understand the goal of life, how to select the appropriate path after gaining true education and applying discernment, and how to work as a service to God. Swami Vivekananda is our guide. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi has also beckoned us to follow the path shown by Swami Vivekananda.

Through Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda is flowing the message to the modern world that there is infinite knowledge and strength residing in each one of us, and that we have to realize this potential ourselves through self-effort and then help others along the same path. 

References

1. *Chhandogya Upanishad*, 7.23.1.
2. *Bhagavadgita*, 18.61.

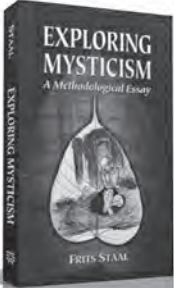
(Continued from page 391)

Notes and References

1. See Swaraj Basu, *Dynamics of a Caste Movement* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2003).
2. These people, the largest minority group in Assam, speak the Tibeto-Burman languages in the north-eastern Indian states of Assam and Meghalaya as well as in Bangladesh.
3. Some of them are *barika*, resides in bamboo plantation; *tishila*, stays in water bodies and are responsible for anaemia; *ghatia*, resides on water banks; *chhunchia*, stays in open fields and attacks people who are defecating; *chalan*, lives in roadside tree branches; *bahta*, lives in dead plantains; *kal*, resides in cremating grounds; *kuhulia*, resides in tree branches; *nangot*, remains nude; *bishua*, causes gait pains; *khai-murti*, causes eating disorders.
4. See Dr Girija Shankar Roy, *Uttarbanger Rajbanshi Samajer Deb-Debi o Puja-Parban* (Siliguri: North Bengal University, 2003), 28.
5. See Dilip Varma, 'Uttarbanger Loukik Aitihya-Masan', *Bihan*, 5/1 (January 2002), 67.
6. See Dr Charu Chandra Sanyal, *The Rajbanshis of North Bengal* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1965), 162.
7. A number of spirits reside everywhere on earth and are ready to cause harm. Some of them are malicious, like *nyan*, or *gnyan*, which lives in trees and rocks and causes sickness and death to humans; *lu*, which lives in all areas and is responsible for leprosy; *tsen*, which lives in the atmosphere and is believed to shoot arrows at humans who disturb it or come close to it and to cause illness and death—*tsen* is a demonic red-complexioned figure that rides a horse and uses a red helmet.

REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



Exploring Mysticism: A Methodological Essay

Frits Staal

Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 41
U A Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar,
Delhi 110 007. Website: www.mldb.com. 2013. xxv + 230 pp. ₹ 495.

The author of this book writes that Christian theologians ‘reject mysticism because of its emphasis not only on rationality but also on what is impersonal, eternal, and general’ (30). Although there is now a branch of well-defined study on mysticism within Christianity, known as ‘mystical theology’, it is not yet part of the core curricula in most Christian seminaries. Further, Christian scholars scrutinize mysticism through structuralist hermeneutics and apply reductionist approaches to the phenomenon of mysticism. This is the result of the historical method practised by Christian scholars—*vide* John Paul Meier’s three volumes on the life of Christ. This is not the proper approach in studying religious phenomena, and cannot be the proper approach at all in studying mysticism. Hinduism, on the other hand, accepts and incorporates within its lived reality the mystical turn in both the individual and the *faith community*.

Staal tackles an intricate and vast field in a systematic manner. He interrogates mysticism both ontologically and philologically. His stress throughout the text is in constructing Indian paradigms for the study of mysticism. While creating such paradigms Staal devotes an entire chapter to the philological and historical contingencies, which should inform the discourse of Indian mysticism. Generally speaking, Western theologians eschew problematizing mystical texts and do not speak of constructing a new methodology for accessing these texts. Therefore, we have a paucity of Christian theology on

mysticism. Also Hindu glossing often seems to be too logical and apparently reduces received divine wisdom to dry philosophical statements. Staal resists this reductionist approach in both Christianity and Hinduism. This is why Staal devotes Part II of the book to ‘How not to Study Mysticism’, a unique feature in texts of this kind. This is a bold step, for Staal’s peers may not like their methodologies for interpreting mysticism to be questioned.

The author is to be praised since he does not waste time with what is the mysterious prerogative of Hinduism: ‘Since we do not know much about what *brahman*-force, *tapas*, and Yoga are, it is fruitless to speculate exactly how they were related’ (79). This is contrary to the scholastic approach to metaphysics and mysticism. Neothomism continues to mar European narratives about mysticism. Thomists tend to take a Newtonian approach to mysticism; they see only the cause and results of grace in the person of the mystic, they reduce the mystic to a medium of God’s grace. Hinduism sees the mystic as potentially divine; the mystic having achieved the *turiya* state is one with Brahman. The mystic is willy-nilly a sign of the truths of Advaita Vedanta. Staal stresses this point in his book. He is perceptive in including photos of certain mystical Indian motifs; the one showing ‘Karman: Ritual Activity in a Vedic Sacrifice’ is necessary in the book, for later Staal speaks of this ritual: ‘Who is that Agni? ... He is an entity postulated as a referent to which the grammatical dative (“*agnaye*”) refers’ (194).

Staal does the impossible: he encapsulates the plethora of mystical experience not only in Hinduism but also in Islam, Buddhism, and Jainism. His scholarship is all-encompassing and masterfully comments on the relevance of ‘Patañjali, Don Juan [pseudonym for a Yaqui Native American], and Freud’ (134) to the study of mysticism.

His discussion on samadhi, as the ultimate mystical union of the soul with Brahman is interesting (151) and in line with contemporary research on brain activity during dreaming and REM sleep. Staal is not an armchair theorist; he proposes empirical research to understand mysticism (152). This need to validate theory with reality is the way forwards for Hinduism. For Hinduism to flourish there is need of empirical proofs of its religious patrimony and more writings in English as well. Staal's work, being in English, is itself a way forwards for Hinduism.

The Second Vatican Council did away with Latin for the celebration of Mass, since Latin was not understood by most practising Roman Catholics. Latin continues to be studied today by a clutch of specialised scholars. Maybe Staal's kind of texts are performing their cultural work by opening up Hinduism to Hindu theologians. Theologising is somewhat an alien concept to canonical Hinduism, but a lived religion needs theologians who can write in a global idiom—in this case, English. Swami Vivekananda encouraged publishing in English, as he had the foresight to understand that the Sanatana Dharma must be rescued from the elitism effected through linguistic isolation and linguistic hegemony. Thus Staal's book on methodology can become the type of text that will usher Hinduism into the twenty-first century.

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**Lectures on Patañjali's
Mahābhāṣya
Volumes IX and X**
P S Subrahmanya Sastri

The Kuppaswami Sastri Research Institute, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004.
Website: www.ksrisanskrit.in. 2011.
Volume IX: xxxvi + 364 pp. ₹ 300;
Volume X: xlvi + 396 pp. ₹ 300.

The Kuppaswami Sastri Research Institute has been doing admirable work in preserving and propagating the wisdom found in Sanskrit texts. It has been publishing various rare texts

with translations into English to ensure that these otherwise inaccessible treasures reach the common people. One such addition to this marvellous corpus of literature is the translation of Patanjali's Mahabhashya into English. These are based on the lectures given by the late Prof. P S Subrahmanya Sastri at the behest of Swami Chandrasekharendra Saraswati of the Kanchi Kamakoti Pitham. The whole work was supposed to be published in 14 volumes. By 1962, 6 volumes were published. After a huge gap, the seventh volume was published in 2009 and the eighth in 2010. The present ones, the ninth and the tenth, were published in 2011.

Prof. P S Subrahmanya Sastri was an extraordinary personality. Founder member of The Kuppaswami Sastri Research Institute, he remained so till his passing away in 1978. He was the first person to be awarded a doctorate in Tamil by the University of Madras. Starting his career as a teacher of mathematics, he went on to do pioneering research in Tamil and Sanskrit. A genius of sorts, he was a master of Sanskrit, Tamil, English, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, German, and French. A devout worshipper of Shiva, he lived a highly principled life. Thoroughly brought up in the Vedic tradition, a Vedic scholar himself, he also possessed a modern outlook on life—he was even a regular tennis player.

Sastri's scholarship is evident in the lucid translation of Patanjali's Mahabhashya. The ninth volume contains *ahnikas*, divisions, forty-two to forty-seven, and the tenth volume contains *ahnikas* forty-eight to fifty-six. Each Panini sutra is followed by the relevant *bhashya*, commentary, and the *varttika*, annotation, of Vararuchi. There are explanatory notes by the author wherever needed. Due to the simplicity and readability of the translation the reader is relieved from the complexity of the original text. Each volume has indexes of the sutras, *varttikas*, *nyayas*, *paribhashas*, and important Sanskrit and English words. Produced elegantly and having a low price, these volumes are a must for every Sanskrit library and also for students and teachers doing serious studies in Sanskrit.

Swami Narasimhananda
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata



**The Garland of Letters:
Essays on Tantra/Mantra Śāstra**

Sir John Woodroffe
(Arthur Avalon)

New Age Books, A-44, Naraina Industrial Area, Phase I, New Delhi 110 028. Website: www.newagebooksindia.com. 2013. xii + 307 pp. ₹ 400.

The book under review is one of the most significant texts on tantra. Tantric texts, in general, are constructs of multiple levels of integrated sadhana, with mantra and yantra combining into *laya*, immersion, in unitive consciousness. In fact, the presence of multiple referents to a single percept or concept is the recurring strategy of tantric sadhana. The mantra arises from *aksharas*, letters, which invoke their combined truth as experience in consciousness. Tantric texts should not be read, says Woodroffe, according to the *prati-shabdham*, order of the words, but according to the *yatha-sambhavam*, facts.

Consisting of thirty-one chapters the book deals with the varied facets of the basic theme of the text. This is summarized in this way: *vak*, speech, is in essence the *shabda*, sound, Brahman and it is kundalini too, which is *shabda brahmamayi*. Woodroffe cites the *Sharada-Tilaka*, which asserts: 'She who is kundalini, the all-pervading Shabda-Brahman, produces Shakti; from this came Dhvani; from Dhvani, Nada; from Nada, Nirodhika; from Nirodhika, Ardhendu; from Ardhendu, Bindu, and then comes Para.' In this way the one principle of creation merges into another or, rather, the gross passes into subtle forms. The whole of creation is a composite, and as the gross passes to the subtle, the reverse also happens. This is the creation and dissolution modes of the seen and unseen universe. The point between these two is the *ghanavastha*, condensed state, or the *bindu*, point.

One may wonder how the primal *bindu* assumes various forms. The *bindu*, alongside the *nada*, primal sound, are states of Shakti through which the germs of jnana, knowledge; *iccha*, desire; and *kriya*, action, manifest the universe. The quintessence of all this is that the *bindu* has its gross as well as subtle manifestations, and as such it is conceived, at the level of comprehension, as

passing gradually from the stage of potency to that of active manifestation. That stage in its original form is termed *maha-bindu* or *para-bindu*, transcendent point, to distinguish it from the other *bindus* (133). In short, *para-bindu* is 'the head of every line of creation', and while remaining 'itself' assumes the aspects of *nada* and *bindu*.

Of further interest and help are Woodroffe's almost uncanny insights into the usually misunderstood aspects of tantric goddesses—the Dasha Mahavidyas, ten goddesses, in general and Kali in particular—in this volume. He suggests that unless the symbolic significance is decoded, such goddesses appear bizarre. To even know tantra, certainly to practise it, one requires grounding in the methodology of what is called *sandhya-bhasha*, twilight language, which has hidden meanings usually for practical application. A good example is given: Kali is 'the Samketa (symbol) which is the effect of the impress of a spiritual Power on the Indian mind' (230), and also as 'the Divinity of the Power of Death' (229).

Kali has the distinction of wearing the *varna-mala*, garland of letters. Yet, at the gross level, she has a garland made up of the heads of demons—demons overpowered by her power of righteousness. Esoteric explanations apart, there is, as Woodroffe notes, 'an inner explanation given in the Indian Tantra-Śāstra, this string of beads is the Garland of Letters (Varṇamālā) that is the fifty, and as some count it, fifty one letters of the Sanskrit Alphabet' (230). And according to the Buddhist view, the garland represents 'the universe of names and forms (Nāma-Rūpa) that is Speech (Śabda) and its meaning or object (Artha)' (ibid.).

The letters manifest themselves at various levels like *para*, supreme; *pashyanti*, visualized; *madhyama*, middle; and *vaikhari*, gross, from the divine *sphota*, Logos, so to say, to the day-to-day meanings. The subtlest meanings are conveyed through 'Hidden Speech letters (Varṇa)', which are the *matrikas*, 'the Little Mothers', 'the subtle forms of gross speech' (231). Moreover, the 'hidden meaning' area branches off into the one connected with the most significant aesthetics of *dhvani*, sound. All rooted, finally, in kundalini, the power of the coiled serpent of unitive consciousness; all embedded in the potential power of *bija*, seed, and *bindu*.

In the context of the maddening proliferation of tantric studies now—even in the Indian vernacular translations—it is necessary to counter the many distorted studies by making available Sir John Woodroffe's serious studies. I feel that a short introduction about Sir John Woodroffe should have been provided in the book. Moreover, an index is absolutely necessary. But just printing the text as it was originally conceived is, of course, a boon to most people interested in the mystical philosophy of tantra.

Dr M Sivaramkrishna

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Kundalini: Stilled or Stirred?

Swami Veda Bharati

D K Printworld, 'Vedasri', F-395, Sudarshan Park, New Delhi 110 015.
Website: www.dkprintworld.com. 2013.
xi + 172 pp. ₹ 195.

Kundalini is a mysterious word and a power for the majority who are groping in the mire of worldliness. It is supposed to be coiled up and lying dormant at the lower end of the spinal column in human beings. Kundalini, symbolically described as a snake, is invisible to the eyes and defies X-rays. And yet its existence cannot be negated in the field of spirituality.

Here is an authoritative book on kundalini by Swami Veda Bharati, currently Chancellor, HHT University, Dehra Dun. He is a DLitt from the Utrecht University, Netherlands, and taught at the University of Minnesota till he met his guru, Swami Rama. He has preached yoga and meditation extensively in the West and now heads two ashramas in Rishikesh, where aspirants receive guidance in meditation in the tradition of Himalayan masters.

The *Katha Upanishad* states: "The Self-existent God destroyed the outgoing senses. Therefore, one sees the outer things and not the inner Self." Seldom does one choose to turn one's eyes inwards and apprehend deathlessness to thus get embedded in Truth. Swami Veda Bharati teaches us to concentrate within and guides aspirants to get grounded in *brahmavidya*, the knowledge of Brahman.

In the 'Introduction' the author clears up many misconceptions about tantra. He defines tantra as Sri Vidya, the meta-science that provides rules through which all sciences operate and whereby the universe is governed. The uncertainties regarding tantra are cleared in these introductory twenty pages. This is followed by a chapter titled 'Why Yogis Choose Celibacy'. Here the male-female relationship is analysed, and is shown that the intensity of pleasure increases as one rises above the male-female relationship.

The rest of the pages that follow clearly describe the noticeable changes of an aspirant in kundalini yoga. The reader is taken step by step through the subtle materials that cover his or her soul in this world, leading one to purity. This is the manifestation of kundalini, the source of universal energy.

The chapter on 'Body Movements' describes the effects of meditations as it becomes deeper. Here some landmarks in meditation have been described as well. This is followed by two chapters titled 'Honey of the Gods I and II', wherein certain tranquillizing experiences and the unfolding of consciousness is described.

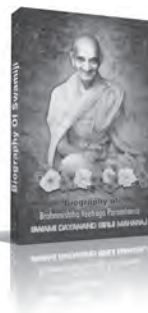
Chapter eleven and twelve are entitled 'Sphere of Light' and 'Ladder of the Thunderbolt' and take the reader still further in the great awareness. In the thirteenth and last chapter the thousand names of the kundalini are given with explanations.

On the whole the book is elevating, and a sincere spiritual seeker is bound to get immense benefit from it. *Kundalini: Stilled or Stirred?* can safely be recommended to all.

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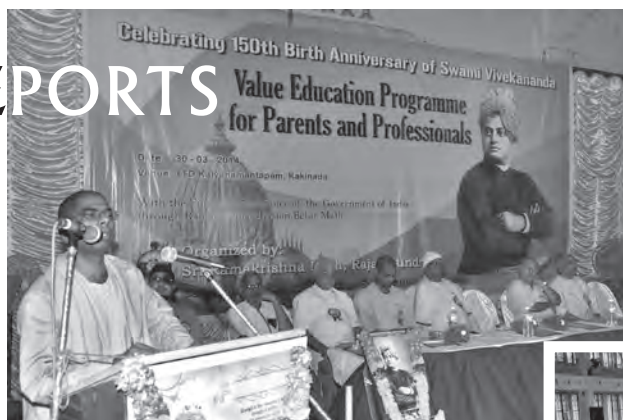


***Biography of Brahmanishtha
Veetrage Paramahansa Swami
Dayanand Giri Maharaj***

A S Mahajan and C L Puri

Devotees of Swamiji Maharaj. 2012.
iv + 149 pp. Free distribution.

REPORTS



*Value education programmes
at Rajahmundry*



Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda

The following centres held various programmes to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. **Baghbazar:** A devotees' convention and a youth convention on 5 and 6 April 2014 respectively, in which about 800 devotees and 700 youths took part. **Delhi:** A three-day workshop for 16 master trainers—who will be training school teachers—of the ashrama's value education programme from 10 to 12 April. Three three-day workshops between 21 and 30 April, in which 240 teachers were trained for conducting value education programmes in schools. **Guwahati:** A value orientation programme for parents and teachers on 12 April, attended by 350 people. A youth convention on 13 April, in which 350 youths took part. **Kozhikode:** Classical music concerts and lectures on 29 and 30 March, attended by about 900 people. **Jalpaiguri:** Cultural competitions on 6 April, in which around 900 students took part. **Nagpur:** Cultural competitions, in which 549 students participated. **Rajahmundry:** Value education programmes for parents at the ashrama and at Kakinada City on 29 and 30 March respectively; about 2,100 parents attended the programmes. **Rajkot:** A state-level value education project from May 2013 to

March 2014, in which school children answered a workbook after studying a few selected books on Swamiji; about 380,000 students of 7,444 schools from 26 districts of Gujarat participated in the programme. **Shillong:** A three-day state-level seminar on 'Unity in Diversity' from 26 to 28 April, attended by about 2,000 people including 1,000 youths. **Swamiji's Ancestral House, Kolkata:** A day-long seminar at the ashrama on 30 March, in which 600 people participated. A devotees' convention at the ashrama on 5 April, in which 700 devotees participated. Two youth conventions, one at Kolkata on 12 April and the other in Sundarbans area on 19 April; about 800 youths took part in the conventions. A cultural programme comprising 3 short dramas on Swamiji at the ashrama on 16 April, attended by about 600 people. On the centre's initiative 5 public meetings were held at different places in and around Kolkata from 23 March to 18 April; about 2,650 people attended the programmes.

News from Branch Centres

Ramakrishna Math, Tamluk, celebrated its centenary from 3 to 9 March. Special worship, *homa*, public meetings, procession, and cultural

programmes were conducted and a commemorative volume was released.

Swami Gautamananda, Adhyaksha, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, unveiled the newly installed eleven-foot bronze statue of Swamiji at **Ramakrishna Mission, Khetri**, on 22 March.

The newly constructed primary school building at **Ramakrishna Mission, Malliankaranai**, was inaugurated on 26 March.

Swami Gautamananda inaugurated the newly constructed medical centre building and the newly built first floor on the value education building at **Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot**, on 9 February.

Sri Shekhar Dutt, governor of Chhattisgarh, declared open the newly constructed hostel building at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narainpur**, on 15 April. Besides, Sri Shekhar Dutt also inaugurated a six-day sports meet held by the centre from 13 to 18 April, in which 1,500 students from 23 schools of 2 districts in Chhattisgarh participated.

The newly constructed non-formal school building at the old campus of **Ramakrishna Math, Vrindaban**, in Panighat was declared open on 15 April.

Srimat Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the newly built lecture hall at **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Memorial, Vadodara**, on 8 April.

Achievements

The high school at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Ramharipur**, received Nirmal Vidyalaya Puraskar 2013, Bankura District, from the School Education Department, Government of West Bengal, in recognition of its commendable efforts in advancing water sanitation and hygiene.

Five class-11 students—Raktim Mitra, Debangshu Ari, Ankan Sardar, Anubhav Ukil, and Saptarshi Mondal—and two class-12 students—Sayan Mandal and Suprovo Ghosh—of the school at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur**, secured the prestigious Kishore Vaigyanik Protsahan Yojana (KVPY) Scholarship 2013—KVPY is funded by the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India, to encourage students to pursue basic science courses and career in research.

Thirty-four students of the school at **Ramakrishna Mission, Viveknagar** (Tripura), won prizes for their excellent performance in Scholarship and Talent Reward Test 2014, a national-level competition for school students conducted by Resonance Eduventures, Kota, Rajasthan. Besides, the school won the Best School Award, consisting of 50,000 rupees, and was ranked second in the list of top ten best schools of the country; the principal of the school was presented with the

*Vivekananda Memorial
Lecture Hall at Vadodara*



Best Principal Award, consisting of 31,000 rupees.

Two class-11 students of Ramakrishna **Mission Vidyapith, Purulia**, secured the prestigious Kishore Vaigyanik Protsahan Yojana Scholarship, 2014. Besides, class-10 students of the Vidyapith secured the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th ranks in the State Level National Talent Search Examination 2014, conducted by the Government of West Bengal.

Amiya Mishra and Saurav Laha, two BSc Physics (Honours) students of the Vidyamandira College at **Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, Belur**, secured the 5th and 10th all-India ranks (within the top twenty) at the Joint Entrance Screening Test, a common qualifying test for admissions into the PhD and Integrated PhD programmes in premier research institutes in India. Besides, the Vidyamandira College has been re-accredited by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council with grade 'A'. The college has also been awarded the status of 'College with Potential for Excellence' for a further period of 5 years, from 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2019, by the University Grants Commission. The Department of Biotechnology, Government of West Bengal, has awarded the Microbiology Department of the Vidyamandira College with 'BOOST 1' status—'BOOST' stands for Biotechnology-based Opportunities Offered to Science and Technology Departments.

Two children—Nimitt Kikani and Mannya Thakkar—trained in the Cerebral Palsy Rehabilitation Centre of **Ramakrishna Ashrama**,

Rajkot, secured the 1st prizes in the national level competitions in recitation and elocution conducted for children with special needs by the Department of Youth, Culture and Sports (Bal Pratibha Vibhag), Government of Gujarat, at Bhavnagar on 26 March.


Relief

Distress Relief · The following centres distributed various items to needy people. **Antpur**: 40 sets of weaving machine accessories, 250 kg health drink powder, 500 packets of biscuits, 112 dhotis, 342 saris, and 1,500 bars of soap in March. **Guwahati**: 120 mosquito nets on 13 April. **Sarisha**: 38 educational kits consisting of textbooks, geometry boxes, exercise books, and school bags from January to March.

Economic Rehabilitation · **Guwahati** centre distributed 5 sewing machines to needy people on 13 April.

Fire Relief · On 28 April **Silchar** centre distributed 9 dhotis, 9 chaddars, 4 saris, 5 mosquito nets, 50 kg rice, 10 kg dal, and 15 plates among 5 families whose houses were gutted in a fire in the town. **Dinajpur** (Bangladesh) centre distributed 110 kg rice, 23 saris, 22 chaddars, 22 mosquito nets, 22 baskets, and 46 bars of soap among 23 families whose houses were damaged in a fire accident at Jashai Para village of Thakurgaon district in April.

Flood Relief · **Dehradun** (Kishanpur) centre distributed 854 garments, 5,516 sweaters, 2,332 jackets, 3,323 shawls, 2,000 caps, 3,573 blankets, 1,000 quilts, 116 mattresses, 1,600 doormats, 2,767 school bags, 150 solar lamps, 437 torches, 665 utensils, and other items among 2,042 families of 34 villages and 2,767 students of 20 schools in Ukhimath, Joshimath, and Rudraprayag areas of Uttarakhand from 8 to 29 March.

Winter Relief · **Antpur** centre distributed 500 blankets in March and **Garbeta** centre distributed 59 winter garments from 16 to 28 February among needy people. 

Correction · May 2014, p. 359: read Purneshwarananda instead of Purneshananda.

Cerebral Palsy Rehabilitation Centre at Rajkot





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